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THE
COST OF A SECRET.

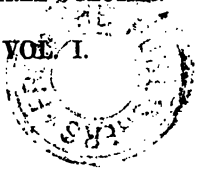


THE
COST OF A SECRET.

BY THE
AUTHOR OF "AGNES TREMORNE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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THE COST OF A SECRET.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

IT was early morning in London. There was a cab with a trunk and carpet-bag in it waiting at the door of a house in Welbeck Street.

It was the end of June, and the sky had a few wide blue spaces in it, and though the houses looked as black and funereal as usual, the mignonette-boxes on the balconies were indisputable tokens of the season.

The door of the house stood open, and if you had looked in, you might have seen, that instead of the usual cleaning and sweeping going on, at this hour (seven o'clock), an elderly maid-servant was taking in a tray, with a slight breakfast on it, into the dining-room.

A quick step rattled down the staircase, and

a girl of sixteen made her appearance, passing through the tiny hall.

"Make haste, Jones, I am sure I am late: remember the train leaves at 8.45, and I shall be an hour getting to the station."

"Never you fear, Miss, there's time enough, leastways I think so."

The girl shrugged her shoulders, drank a cup of tea standing, and with a piece of bread in her hand, was running up-stairs again.

"Your aunt is as likely as not asleep, Miss."

"But I *must* say good-bye." She was already up the second flight of stairs, and, knocking more gently than her haste would have led one to expect, waited.

"Come in," said a voice, and she opened the door. The shutters were shut, but a still burning rushlight gave a dim revelation of a comfortable bed-room. The curtains were closely drawn round the bed, but one was slightly opened just as the young girl groped her way to the bed-side.

"Bessie will go with you to the station, my dear, and put you in the ladies' carriage, and they will meet you at Brookferry. There is your quarter's money. I have added a sovereign to it, in case you should want more than usual."

"Thank you, aunt."

The same unmoved voice continued from the depths of the bed. "To-day is Monday: write

to me Thursday, I shall be anxious to know how you get on. Good-bye."

The girl stooped to kiss her aunt, but the light was too faint to allow her to distinguish anything in the interior of the bed, so her lips only touched the edge of the nightcap.

"Good-bye, aunt. Send for me if you are not well." She lingered a little, but there was no reply. The curtains fell close together again, and all was still. It was, perhaps, the closeness and darkness of the room which made the girl's step so much slower and graver as she left the room and again descended the stairs.

Her hat and gloves, and cloak, were put on, and she stepped quite demurely into the cab. Bessie followed her in, while the elderly damsel stood on the steps and watched the cab off. She looked very serious as she did so. Perhaps she felt that the only element of cheerfulness and life had left the house, and that it would be a very dull abode for the next three months. If so, it was not an acknowledged or recognised feeling. No martyrdom would have forced such a confession from her lips. Had any one questioned her at this moment, she would have said, "I am glad we shall be quiet for a bit, leastways I shall be able to mend those sheets and tablecloths; when Miss Ivy is here it is as much as one can do to darn a few pairs of stockings.

She does so interrupt one, and worries, worries, so she do."

The young girl whom she called Miss Ivy was soon as bright and cheerful as before her parting with her aunt. The cab drove into the crowded heart of London, and after some delays, which considerably tried Ivy's patience, so eager was she to be in time, it deposited her at the station a quarter of an hour before the departure of the train.

She jumped into her seat (not however in the ladies' carriage) with great satisfaction. To an inexperienced traveller there is always a lurking fear that all clocks and watches save the timepiece of the inexorable train are too slow, and that, consequently, there is a dreadful chance of being too late. To see the train slowly hissing away, as one's feet touch the platform is one of the major miseries of life. It gives us an experience of the irrevocable which is thoroughly dispiriting.

It was a lovely breezy summer-day. The girl's thoughts were full of a vague confused kind of delight. She lived habitually in London, and without any particular beauty, the country through which the train cut its way, was open, cultivated, and, in some parts, wooded. The wind was strong and fresh, and the tall corn bent in swiftly moving undulations before it. There was an atmosphere of active, progressive life



abroad. The myriad voices of nature seemed to speak one word, the most inspiring word of all, "Hope!"

The young lady in the train was of an age to feel to the utmost these outward influences. The circumstances which usually surrounded her, were of a kind to add to the pleasantness of these impressions. Her life hitherto had been most secluded, and passed in almost unbroken monotony. Liberty, air, change were all novelties.

Let us look at her as she sits there.

Ivy Clayre has not the beauty of a heroine, but she is perfectly healthy, and in the freshest bloom of youth. It is scarcely possible to judge what that face may become in after life. At present it is bright and intelligent, nothing more. The only other occupants of the carriage were a lady and gentleman. The lady was one of those ladies who usually travel with an unlimited number of loose parcels, to the infinite despair and utter disgust of porters and guards, and who, besides their own superfluity of baggage, are covetous of other people's bags and baskets, and are always making attempts to seize them, and add them to their own. Her own seat, the one next Ivy, on which that young lady had deposited her own modest bag, the one opposite, the ground, the roof of the carriage, were all incumbered, and she had walled herself up, with an air of

triumph, behind a huge basket which looked as if it contained, a surreptitious dog.

The gentleman was a complete contrast to her. His dress, his tiny valise, his strapped cloak, were models of military compactness. There was almost an affectation of rigidity about it. He was diligently studying "Bradshaw," and, beyond one glance at his companions, had not again raised his eyes. He was apparently about forty, though he may have looked older than he was, from a certain wiriness of appearance, but to Ivy's eyes of sixteen he appeared an elderly man, with rather a saturnine expression of face, and she did not think him interesting enough to give him a second glance.

When the train stopped at Prestan, the lady with the parcels got out.

"Make haste, ma'am—look sharp there."

"There are two other bags and a basket under the seat, and my umbrella, and a brown-paper parcel, and a small bandbox."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the official.

"And my dressing-case, and a green bag —"

"This is mine," said Ivy, gently.

"Excuse me, I believe it is mine."

"Here is my name, 'Ivy Clayre' on the brass-plate."

"I beg your pardon. Ah! there is mine. Thank you—thank you," as the gentleman lifted

out some of her belongings. At last the train moved on, and the lady was seen standing amid a wreck of packages, which strewed the platform around her.

When Ivy turned away with a smile she could not repress, she found her remaining companion looking fixedly at her. Not, however, rudely, but with a grave and persistent steadiness of observation, as if he sought some resemblance in her face to some other face. After a while he desisted, and resumed his studies.

At length the station to which she was bound was reached. She sprang out, forgetting in her haste, her bag and shawl. These were handed out to her by the gentleman who had been again silently observing her, and as she thanked him their eyes met. Each thus received such a distinct impression of the person of the other, that at a long distant period after this journey, mutual recognition was instantaneous.

The trunk and bag were ejected, and after the pause of a few minutes the train moved on.

"I bees sent for you, miss," said a man's voice; "you be Miss Clayre, if you please?"

"Yes; do you come from Brookferry?"

"As you pleases, marm. I am Mr. Ashley's groom, Snip."

Miss Clayre went through the station, and at the other door was a cart, into which the porter

put her luggage, and a four-wheeled chaise, in which sat an over-dressed, sharp-faced woman, about thirty.

"How do you do?" she said, as soon as she saw the young girl; "will you get in? Is it all right?" she asked the groom, and on his assenting nod, and "if you please," turned to Ivy; "then get in, and let us be off."

"My mother was not able to meet you herself. She is not very well."

"And Cordelia?" Ivy asked, in a timid voice.

"I do not know; for I have not seen her to-day. But of course she is very dull and sad." This was said in a reproachful tone to her companion.

"I am very sorry."

"Oh, there is not much the matter, I should think. People always have to pay for their follies."

As one of these follies must have been that of marrying her own brother, Ivy Clayre felt, to say the least, extremely uncomfortable.

"That is Brookferry; it will seem a homely kind of place to you."

The exclamation of delight which was on Ivy's lips was effectually checked by this remark.

The lady who made it, seemed working herself up into a fit of ill-temper, which took the ostensible form of self-depreciation.

"We are very humble people indeed, Miss

Clayre. You must not expect to find us like your fine London friends. But we will do our best to amuse you."

"Oh, thank you—I am sure—"

"We live quite plainly, pay our way, and do not live beyond our means. We do not care a fig for your fashions and grandeurs. It would have been happier for Cordelia if she had thought the same."

A dead silence followed. Ivy wished herself in Welbeck Street again. Her castles in the air were demolished at once. She had hoped that this visit would have healed the feud between her own family and that of her sister-in-law. Her love for her brother, her respect for his taste, had led her to imagine that the wrongs had been on the side of the Clayres, that the Ashleys, represented by his wife, were faultless. She had had a chivalrous wish to prove, she at least, was free from the pride and worldliness of her relatives; but here, there seemed excuse enough for any dislike on the part of her aunt and grandfather. Such purse-proud combative vulgarity was odious. Can Cordelia be like this woman? she thought; and she had an alarming remembrance of a photograph once seen, which resembled in its outlines, making due allowance for difference of age and complexion, the sharp, decided lineaments of the face beside her.

They were driving through a lane bordered by hedges of wild rose and thorn, till they came to a large white gate. It was swung back by their attendant, who then disappeared in a side-walk, while they passed up a sweep of ascending gravel-road, which skirted along a meadow on one side, and a luxuriant garden on the other, till by a sudden turn it brought them to the front entrance of the house.

The two ladies alighted. They went up a broad staircase to the first floor, and on the landing-place, an elderly lady met them.

"How do you do, my dear?" she said, kindly and Ivy was pleased to be welcomed by a milder specimen of womanhood than the one who had been her companion the last hour.

She led the way to a pleasant cheerful room, looking out on the garden and the meadows. The fragrance of the new-mown hay and of the profuse roses blooming below came refreshingly through the open window. A stout farmer-looking man was seated near the window. It was Mr. Ashley. His manner was less cordial than his wife's, but not so vulgar as his daughter's. Still it was so grave and formal, that Ivy felt dispirited and shy. There was no one else in the room, which was evidently not the drawing-room, but a morning sitting-room. She did not like asking again after her sister-in-law,

but contented herself with silently admiring the view from the windows.

"Would you like to take off your hat and cloak?" said Mr. Ashley; "will you show Miss Clayre to her room, Sarah?"

Miss Ashley obeyed her father, and led the way across a long passage up a few steps to a pretty small bed-room.

This bed-room, and another next it, were the only ones on this side of the house, and on the first floor. They were built over the large drawing-room down-stairs and had been added by Mr. Ashley when he first came.

She closed the door, and Ivy was alone.

She waited a minute, and then threw herself on a low seat by the window.

"How shall I get through these three months?" was her almost audible exclamation.

CHAPTER II.

IVY was not of a disposition to be ever depressed for more than five minutes. After scarcely that number of seconds, she began to think what were likely to be the enjoyments she should have during her stay at Brookferry. "First," she thought to herself, "country walks. I am sure it is a beautiful place for walks, and I know that in the country one can walk alone. Books,"—here she paused. There were no books in the room she had left, she had seen that at a glance, and she had brought only one or two volumes in her trunk. Then, again, her thoughts went to her unknown sister. It was scarcely friendly, she thought, in Cordelia to have allowed her to be in that house so long without welcoming her. What a strange, uncongenial set they all seemed. At this point of her meditations, Ivy jumped up, and, locking her door, began vigorously unpacking. Her trunks had been removed into her room, and this occupation was sufficiently interesting to absorb her attention, and draw her from a subject which was somewhat irritating.

She had just concluded a last arrangement of collars and handkerchiefs, when a gong sounded, and she heard a knock at the door.

She opened it, and Miss Ashley entered.

"We dine early, Miss Clayre. I hope you will not mind it."

"I assure you we always dine early."

Miss Ashley smiled sardonically, and preceded her down stairs.

Mr. and Mrs. Ashley were seated, and the other two took their seats.

Mrs. Ashley looked sad and serious; Mr. Ashley and his daughter, cross.

"Cordelia is not well enough to come down," whispered the elder lady to Ivy.

Miss Ashley made some ironical apologies for the simplicity of the repast, at which the frown on her father's brow deepened, and deepened, until evidently his indignation mastered him completely, and, with an oath, he desired her to be silent.

Ivy could understand the provocation; but she was too guileless to perceive its purpose. She felt that to Mr. Ashley this apologetic tone, as regarded his domestic arrangements, expressed to the sister of the man who was so deeply obliged to him, must have been galling in the extreme. That Miss Ashley so hated the name of Clayre, that it was her desire to render it equally ob-

noxious to her father, was for the present undiscovered by her.

Ivy had not, however, tact enough at the moment to address herself frankly to Mr. Ashley, which would at once have enlisted him in her favour. She was not timid, but shy. Her cheeks were dyed scarlet, and her answers were so abrupt, that Mr. Ashley became confirmed in his notion of the insolent pride of these penniless Clayres. "D——d impertinence" rose to his lips once or twice.

Mrs. Ashley looked vexed and bewildered; but was too much awed by her husband, and embarrassed by her daughter, to interfere.

When the dinner was over, Ivy, in a state of desperation, asked if she might find her way to the garden.

"If you will wait, I will go with you; but I must send a parcel to town first," said Miss Ashley.

"Thank you, I will not trouble you. I am sure I can find my way." And Ivy darted through an open glass door, which led from the hall into the garden, and waited for no further discussion.

The front of the house looked on a large lawn, separated from it by a broad gravel carriage-road, and sloping upwards, in gentle undulations, to the foot of an ivy-covered bastion, or rather

wall, 40 feet high, and about 16 feet wide, which extended about a quarter-of-a-mile directly in front of the house. Rude slippery stairs had been cut in it, and the breadth of the top formed a kind of terrace, from which the view was lovely, extending over woods and valleys to the sea.

When Ivy reached this terrace, she was unable to repress an exclamation of delight. The view was exquisite; and the fresh wind was bracing and buoyant as the element from which it blew. The sea looked like a broad belt of liquid light girding the land, and parting it from the sky; and the landscape, on which the evening shadows were rapidly advancing, was of a soft, subdued tint, which harmonised well with that glittering border, silver on the water, crimson on the horizon.

The house, when Ivy turned towards it, was already dark, shaded as it was from the evening sun by this bastion. On each side of it, and enclosing the lawn into a square, was, on the left, a long conservatory and hothouse, one end of which jutted out from the house, and, at the other, touched, and was built against, one end of the wall on which she stood; on the right, a thick, close plantation of firs, with a winding walk between them, formed a shrubbery, which extended from the out-houses to this same wall, and grew beside it for a considerable space. The close, thick trees bent over, and formed a shady portion of

the terrace; under them had been placed a rustic table and chairs.

Ivy seated herself. The pleasure of sitting alone, and in the open air, was something quite new to her. It gave her a taste of an enjoyment which she felt would compensate for whatever was disagreeable to her in her new home. She thought she would escape here, and, either with a book or with her own reflections, spend the greater part of the next three months.

"It is quite useless to suppose I shall like them; and I am sure they have taken a dislike to me already. How could Gerard enter such a family?"

Ivy had forgotten the circumstances of the marriage, and how little Gerard knew of the Ashleys when he married Cordelia Ashley. Besides this, no one had ever thought of explaining very distinctly to her, that though the Ashleys had been as indignant at the marriage as the Clayres, it was Mr. Ashley who had paid Gerard Clayre's debts, and enabled him to leave England. To Ivy it was still a mystery why Cordelia had not accompanied her husband. She was not to be enlightened as to this as soon as she thought.

About seven o'clock another gong sounded; and, conjecturing it to be for tea, she descended, and re-entered the house just as the urn was carried across the passage.



She expressed her delight at the view she had seen, so unaffectedly and warmly, that Mr. Ashley thawed a little, and offered to drive her the next day to the sea-shore. Miss Ashley's face grew black, but she was silent. After tea, Mr. and Mrs. Ashley played piquet for an hour ; and then he took up the newspaper, while his wife and daughter discussed in a low voice some village news. Ivy energetically repressed her yawns. She longed for a book, for a piece of work, for any thing in short which would have occupied or amused her. The ticking of the clock fidgeted and yet excited her. She wondered whether it would be considered rude to ask to retire. Her journey, she hoped, would serve for an excuse. She was tired, not so much from the fatigue as the excitement. The moments went by, but she could not make the necessary effort. At last the clock pointed to ten. Miss Ashley seemed to know the hour by intuition, and put away her work.

"My father likes to go to bed early, Miss Clayre ; but I will sit up with you till your usual hour."

"I always go to bed early," said Ivy ; "and to-night I am rather tired."

"How thoughtless of me not to have remembered your journey ; but we country people think nothing of half a day's journey in a comfortable railroad carriage."

Ivy bit her lips to keep in rather a pert answer. Her temper was getting a little troubled, at last; but she was successful, and, bidding the others good-night, had the satisfaction of parting with Miss Ashley at her bedroom door.

Ivy fancied the next room must be Miss Ashley's, for she heard her turn back and open the next door, and enter a room on the other side. She locked her own door, undressed, and put out the light. The moon was shining in with such glory at her open window, that she leant out to look at it. Her room looked out on the opposite side of the house from the lawn. A beautiful flower garden, into which the windows of the lower rooms opened, sent up its fragrant night odours. The meadows lay before her in long moonlit tracks, with here and there a shadow from some large tree.

She heard the shutting of the various doors, and then all was silence for a time.

Suddenly, two figures stepped out on the balcony of the next room to hers. One, Miss Ashley, was talking vehemently.

"I never heard such nonsense; making yourself ill, crying, agitating yourself,—for what? A pretty opinion your sister-in-law will have of you. She has been here since one o'clock, and you have not seen her."

"Has she mentioned her brother?"

"Your husband! I think not. She is proud and dignified enough, *I* can tell you. For my part, I cannot tell what such people are made of. She looks upon us as if we were dirt, as compared to her. And when I think that, but for us, that——"

"Hush!"

"Her brother would have been in gaol, I have not patience to look at her. And to think of his cruelty, too."

"Sarah, how can you speak so?"

"I speak the truth. Have you heard from him? Did he not part from you with the utmost coolness? Did he not pretend to resent my father's proper care of you, that you should not go with him till his prospects were a little settled, by saying that, if that were the case, you must not join him till he wrote for you? From the moment you arrived in England, three months after your marriage, has he ever behaved like a husband to you? What would become of you, but for poor, despised Brookferry?"

"*Not* despised."

"A fine end of all those accomplishments, and that foreign education. I told my father it would be no good letting you go with Mrs. Vibert, and this is the upshot of it. Married to a beggar, and to one whose family hate you. Well, good-night; you look as pale as a ghost. Don't worry yourself into a fever."

Ivy heard her step back into the room ; and, after another pause, she heard the door open, and listened to the retreating steps.

She waited eagerly, and then, when all was silent, she opened her own door softly ; and, without hesitating or reflecting a minute, opened the door nearest to her own.

Cordelia Clayre was still standing on the balcony of the room ; but she turned round when she heard the door open, and moved to the threshold of the room in mute astonishment.

Ivy could just see the tall, slender figure, with the white dressing-gown folded carelessly round it, the long, thick hair hanging in braids over the shoulders ; the oval face, with the soft, tearful eyes looking towards her ; and then, with one spring, she rushed to her with open arms.

“My dear Cordelia, I have been longing to see my new sister.”

“Ivy,” was all that Cordelia could say, as she made her sit down ; and, drawing a small stool beside her, sat down also.

She trembled so she could not stand.

“Let me look at you, Cordelia. Gerard told me how beautiful you were.”

Cordelia was beautiful. The photograph was a slander. The slightly aquiline nose may have borne a faint resemblance to her sister's shrewish one, but there was nothing else in the least like

Sarah. The pale roseleaf skin, the masses of chestnut-coloured hair, the luminous hazel eyes. the beautiful brow, were all lovely adjuncts to a lovely whole. Cordelia was, in the fullest sense of the word, a beautiful woman.

CHAPTER III.

THERE is so much passion in one's early friendships, that one may say with truth, that a girl or boy's first love is always of his or her own sex. In looking back on our early recollections, most of us can recall a feeling, which has perhaps left a heartache in all our subsequent experience, such as Copperfield had for Steerforth; and in all women's lives some other woman has taken a place and held an influence, which no after impressions can erase.

Ivy had an artistic love for beauty which had never yet found due aliment; there was a latent enthusiasm and romance in her character which had hitherto been undeveloped, and a warmth and depth in her heart, which only needed acceptance from another heart, to be lavished freely and fully. Cordelia satisfied all these requirements. In addition, there was that desire, so earnest in the young—

. . . to put away all wrong,
To make straight distorted wills,
And to empty the broad quiver
Which the wicked bear along.

Ivy had a dim feeling that Cordelia was doubly a victim. That she was alienated from her own family, and disliked by the Clayres. She made a vow she would throw herself in the breach, and be Cordelia's champion against each and all.

"Do not think it unkind of me," said Cordelia, after a pause, "not to have met you ; but——"

"Do not say a word. It was my fault. I ought to have asked for you, and come at once to you. Have you been ill?"

"Yes, but I am better now."

"What a lovely place this is. I walked to that kind of terrace at the end of the garden, and was so pleased with the view. It is so new to me to see anything but houses."

"There are beautiful walks in every direction. I will take you to some of my old favourite spots. I have not been out since I returned here ; but I shall have an object now in showing them to you."

"Mr. Ashley said he would drive me to the sea-shore to-morrow."

"Did he ? I am very glad."

Cordelia looked both surprised and pleased.

"Shall you be well enough to come too?"

"Not to-morrow, I think ; but we shall have plenty of walks and drives. You are to be here three months, are you not?"

"Yes; and half-an-hour ago I did——" Ivy stopped, confused.

Cordelia smiled. "You were rather afraid you would find the months long?"

"Not now; but I have never been among strangers, and I fancied—I dare say it was only my fancy—that your sister was not pleased at my coming."

"Dear Ivy, it will not do to judge any of us hastily. Sarah, when you know her better, you will find——But it is no use (the beautiful face flushed); I must leave your judgment of us to right itself."

Ivy stooped and kissed her. "I am not wrong in all my judgments, even if they are hasty, I am sure. But I want you to tell me about yourself—about Gerard When did you hear?"

Cordelia could not have heard her, for she rose, and said, hurriedly taking the candle from the table: "It is too late, Ivy; I ought not to keep you up the first night. Stop, I will go with you to your room."

Ivy would not hear of it, but Cordelia insisted, and they went together to Ivy's room. Cordelia made her get into bed, and drew the clothes round her, and bade her "Good night."

Ivy was very sleepy, and the magic touch of the pillow seemed to draw down her lids at once. She had a confused idea that she saw Cordelia

bending over her with the light in her hand, and then all was unconsciousness. Cordelia remained by her side. She looked at her as the eyes closed in the hushed calm of slumber. She seemed as if she were exploring the youthful features to find some likeness, and without success, for she sighed very deeply, and with a light step left the room.

When she re-entered her own, though, as she had said, the hour was late, she sat down on the chair Ivy had left, and putting her head on her hand, seemed lost in thought. After a time she rose from her seat, and opened a desk which was on the table, and took out a purse, which she opened, and counted the money in it. There were five pounds in gold, and a little silver. She smiled rather sadly, and put it in again. There was evidently not enough money in it for some purpose she contemplated. She then took out a letter, which had evidently been much read from its worn edges and faded writing. She unfolded it, looked at it, and then replaced it with a shudder in her desk. Again she sat down in earnest thought for some time, and then, having apparently made up her mind, began writing a letter. We will look over her as she does so.

“A thousand thanks for the letter and books received to-day. But how provoking that you

should have been so near the Ferry, and that I could not see you. No, my dear friend, the time has not come for my acting on the resolution I formed when I last wrote to you. I shall certainly stay three months longer here. Ivy Clayre has come to stay with us for three months. You must have travelled in the same train. Did you notice a young lady who got out at the Wroxton station? When my father made those arrangements, he stipulated for a visit from her. He thought it would be a pleasure to me—a consolation for the grief he saw, but which he could not fully understand. Even were she not here, I am absolutely without means to undertake the journey at present; but I hope that my few trinkets, when sold, will add a little to my store. And then I depend somewhat on my plan of advertising. Surely people would be glad, if they went abroad, of a *bonne* or a nursery governess who can speak both French and Italian. I would accept any situation that would give me the means of commencing my plan. You see how reasonably and calmly I write, yet my heart is aching with that dull, hopeless ache which it has had ever since I read *that* letter, and I last spoke with *that* woman. But I will not allude to the past. I can only get on by cutting out of my life those few months of exquisite happiness, of intense pain. Sarah is curious and anxious to the



last degree. My father is quite silent, but often looks at me inquiringly and suspiciously. My mother is, as usual, all kindness, and explains everything in the way she thinks has the least chance of throwing blame on others. I could have deceived—no, I will not say deceived—that is too hateful a word—I could have kept their curiosity and wonder at bay, but this girl, it will be more difficult with her.

“She is like her brother. She has the same fair complexion and hair. She is not handsome, but there is such a directness, such an openness in her expression—such intelligence, combined with so much innocence, that one feels inexpressibly drawn to her. Strange to say, in one so young, there is a decision and a firmness about her which give one a feeling of reliance and confidence. We shall be friends, I feel; but if friends, how can I explain myself or justify others?

“I deserve all. I who had vowed myself to art—who had thought to make my way alone, and to give all my faculties, qualities, mind, heart, gifts, to the profession for which I had seemed born, to fall into such a common-place trap. A woman thinks she can take her stand alone on a pedestal, and she has such weak fibres in her nature, that the first man who has the guile to attract her attention, to excite her affec-

tions, can beckon to her, and she flutters down beside him,—not only beside him, but at his very feet. And how often does she find, that when there, the whim has passed away from his mind, and he is indifferent to her, or accepts the first subterfuge which presents itself, as a decent pretext for forsaking her.

“You will think I am unjust, I know. I sometimes fear I am getting soured and embittered, and yet, heaven knows, I wish to do right.

“There is one firm purpose, however, in my heart. I *will* be independent,—not only independent myself, but all that money advanced by my father, and the loss of which, I fear, destroyed poor Sarah’s prospects, shall be repaid. How or when, I know not, but if I live, it shall be, sooner or later. I feel what an injustice it has been to her. You know that on our arrival in England, a heavy pecuniary trouble fell on Gerard. But for my father he could not have left England. His signature, imprudently given to a friend, involved him to the extent of eight thousand pounds. The sum of five thousand, which was to be my fortune at my father’s death (he only allowed me the interest of it on my marriage), was at once given by my father for that purpose; moreover, three thousand pounds were added, as a loan, out of Sarah’s portion. I think my father was glad of the opportunity of thus nobly replying to

Sir Arthur's insulting disapproval of our marriage. In the great controversy between us, Gerard is so wrong, that my indignation swallows up my love ; but I have a loyalty, a sense of honour, or what you will, that will never allow me to mention his name with reproach but to you, and it is impossible even to discuss the matter with Sarah. It is only from the newspapers that I know that the steamer has touched at Gibraltar, Malta, and Alexandria. He will not write until he has reached Madras. But, indeed, I do not expect he will write at all. I do not know how I shall maintain silence on this point with Ivy. He is very dear to her I know from her letters to him. I do not wish to rob him of that love. I must, therefore, avoid much intimacy with her, and yet my heart yearns to her. I have so little sympathy here, that it would be very precious to me to find, as I assuredly should in her, tastes, aims, pursuits, such as I have been accustomed to. With the exception of my letters to you, of that little diary which I began in my happy days, and which I still keep, what record have I of the past but the ring on my finger ? When I am dead, Gerard shall read that diary and know the truth.

"Ivy will, I know, cling to me in this strange place. Must I keep her at a distance ? I must think of all this, and decide as best I can. But write to me, and aid me with your counsel, which

has never failed me, with your sympathy, which has always consoled me.

“Your affectionate friend and pupil,

“CORDELIA CLAYRE.”

She closed and sealed the letter, and then lit her night lamp and went to bed. But it was not to sleep immediately. She lay wakefully looking at a print in her room which hung over the mantelpiece, directly opposite her bed. It was one she had brought from the continent with her, and it had been framed and hung in her room. It was from Gallait's famous picture, “*L'Art et la Liberté*.” A dignified man, who is playing the violin with an air of thorough enjoyment, leaving an impression of the noblest pleasure a human being is capable of—the utterance of the spiritual part of his being through art, and surrounded by every circumstance which can give freedom and expansion. There may be poverty, but there is an entire absence of conventional restraint. Outside the window a piece of vine is twining in, and gives the interior a warm southern suggestion. Italy was brought back to Cordelia's mind as she looked on it, the last thing before her eyes closed.

As she lay there, so delicately beautiful, no eye that merely observed superficially would have connected that soft feminine beauty with the

sternness and almost hardness of the letter she had just written. One must have looked very closely to have seen how firm were the lines of the lips and the outline of the small chin. What eagerness in the slightly inflated nostril, and what character in the straight brow and broad forehead. There was a shadow under the eyes which told of tears ; and now that in sleep there was no control over the muscles of the face, it looked very sorrowful, and almost severe. But the complexion was so delicate, the features so harmoniously regular, and the abundance of the rich hair so womanly, that Cordelia Clayre was always considered by strangers "that sweet creature." In reality, few women had stronger, deeper natures. High-minded, affectionate, generous, but passionate, proud, and uncompromising.

Her sleep seemed fitful and disturbed, and once she started up, and woke herself with the cry, "Never! never!"

It was a long time before she slept again.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. ASHLEY occupied that position in social life which is perhaps the most difficult of all to define. He was not a farmer, and not a country gentleman, but something between both. Hybrids are rarely successful or fortunate. Mr. Ashley was rejected by one class, and avoided by the other. Brookferry had become his by an unexpected legacy from a capricious godmother. His father, a farmer in the north of England, was glad to find his fourth son thus well provided for, though somewhat sore at the sudden exaltation of one member of the family over the others. This uncomfortable feeling fossilised at last into a complete alienation as years passed away. The Ashleys of the Thorpe in Cumberland knew nothing whatever of the Ashleys of the Ferry in Devonshire.

From his parentage Mr. Ashley derived those old-fashioned prejudices, that stern, uncompromising Puritan spirit, which, but for a natural warmth of heart and generosity of temper, would have degenerated into saturnine and tyrannical



bigotry. As it was, the northern "burr" in his speech, which gave a depth and raciness to his tones without rendering them rough or coarse, was the emblem of a certain strength and massiveness in his character, which did not bend easily to the unmeaning conventionalities or fluent falsities of society, but which was never deficient in real kindness or liberality. The great county people, of course, took no notice of Mr. Ashley: the few acres of Brookferry did not give it any claim to be called an estate. It was too far from Wroxton to bring it within range of the visiting civilities of the Wroxtonites proper, and the farmers of the neighbourhood neither sought the notice nor were invited to the companionship of a man whose income was scarcely larger than their own, and yet between whom and themselves they perceived a very strong line of demarcation. Had Mr. Ashley been the father of sons instead of daughters, the natural gregariousness of youth would have broken through this sharply defined line of isolation; races, meetings, parish business, elections, would have brought the sons, and through them, the fathers, into contact with their neighbours; but with daughters the case was remediless.

The families at the Manor, at the Rectory, and the few maiden ladies who inhabited the nearest village, were the only associates of the Ashleys.

I must name one exception. Mr. Ashley had come a bachelor to Brookferry, but had fallen in love with a lady who was spending the summer at the Rectory with her friend the Rector's wife. He married her. She was an orphan, without any near ties, and had spent her life with no nearer approach to home affection than a great love for a schoolfellow. This schoolfellow was an heiress, and a beauty. She had been sent to Paris to complete her education at the time that Cordelia Russell was staying at the Rectory. Cordelia's letters soon informed her friend of the change in her prospects, and of her engagement to Mr. Ashley, but they did not meet again till long after the marriage. Ellinor Ward had then become Ellinor Vibert, and had been a widow many years. She spent a summer at Brookferry; it was just before Mr. Ashley's youngest daughter was born. She was its godmother, and called it Cordelia, after her friend. Childless herself, the beautiful infant delighted her, and she vied with its own mother in petting and nursing it. From that date she never allowed many months to pass without a visit to Brookferry, and she usually carried off her little god-daughter on her return.

Mrs. Vibert appreciated and respected Mr. Ashley; and he, though he was stubborn to confess it, could not resist the attractions of this

elegant and accomplished woman. She was as entirely different from anyone he had ever seen, as if she had belonged to a different species. She was highly educated, and naturally clever and spirited. However much he might declare to his wife that he was thankful she was a contrast in every respect to her friend, he always felt a blank the first evenings of her absence.

Had he known her as a girl, he would have pronounced such independence of opinion dangerous; but in a married woman—in one who was a “power” in the county, and who managed admirably the cares of a large property—it was permissible. He discussed questions with her “as if she were a man.” She had the good sense and energy which Mr. Ashley thought peculiarly the heritage of the masculine half of the creation. This respect for her judgment, this appreciation of her generous nature, and this admiration of her singular beauty, had made a greater impression on Mr. Ashley than he was aware. Had he been less thoroughly single-minded, his regard might have taken proportions which would have caused sorrow to his guileless wife; but, as it was, he considered that his value for Ellinor was the precise reflex of Mrs. Ashley’s. And certainly no one could have detected a deeper feeling, except from the fact that on any difference of opinion he was especially imperious

and bitter towards Mrs. Vibert, and that he had far less patience with any feminine foibles she exhibited than he had with his wife's. He was severe and exacting in his judgment of her, and was totally unconscious that it was because he expected her to act up to the faultless ideal that he had formed of her. All the protecting gentleness of his heart was centred in Mrs. Ashley; but this rough, hard man had in him a secret vein of poetry and fancy, and Mrs. Vibert excited and answered this. It was a subject's chivalric and loyal devotion to a fair heroic queen, not the affection of a man for a woman, and it could and did co-exist with the most stainless fidelity to his wife.

Mrs. Vibert herself was entirely ignorant of it. She esteemed and liked him, but could not disguise from herself that her friend's husband was bigoted and crotchety, and had very little knowledge of the world.

From his own wife Mr. Ashley never experienced a contradiction, or even the smallest variation from his dicta. Mrs. Ashley was not highly educated, nor was she naturally possessed of a strong character or a keen intelligence. As a girl she was a gentle, lovely, loving being; as a woman she was tender, patient, indulgent to a fault. She loved her husband with a passionate devotion which time had been powerless to



diminish. To minister to him indefatigably and continually, was her notion of perfect happiness. To hear Mr. Ashley talk, to see Mr. Ashley eat, to watch Mr. Ashley sleep, were the objects for which she had been brought into the world. It was almost ludicrous, and yet pathetic; it was so like the dumb affection and self-abnegating reverence of an animal.

To her children she was a fond, indulgent mother; but her love for them was faint and feeble in comparison to her conjugal idolatry. Of Sarah she had always been rather afraid; and Sarah would have probably tyrannised over her mother unmercifully, had not her father early prevented it. Cordelia was so beautiful an infant, that both father and mother had been tempted to spoil her; but Mrs. Vibert had used her influence to prevent this by indulging her so decidedly herself, that little was left for them to do; and then she had so continually taken her to her own house, that she seemed as much her child as theirs. Cordelia had accompanied Mrs. Vibert abroad, and had remained six years with her. It was in Italy she had met and married Gerard Clayre.

There was something peculiarly loveable in Mrs. Ashley's imperturbable sweetness of nature. She literally saw everything and everybody *couleur de rose*. It was almost provoking to observe her

obtuseness as to sin and wrong. Mistakes, errors, she admitted and lamented ; but evil and guilt she could not see.

No one left her room, after paying her a visit, without feeling their self-complacency increased. She always saw something to praise and approve.

“ Call on Mrs. Ashley, and you will hear something to your advantage,” was the advice a somewhat satirical friend of hers gave to a lady who was lamenting the ill-nature of the world. And this was in no spirit of flattery or polished falsehood, but from the innocent goodness of her disposition. But, so perversely constituted is wicked human nature, that this peculiarity was ridiculed by her friends, and rather diminished her influence with them. To most persons a spice of ill-nature in the remarks they hear, gives an idea of the cleverness of those who utter them. It requires more judgment than is common, to understand, how very easy it is to detect evil ; and that eyes which overlook evil and discern good, have, in truth, the keenest insight. Miss Ashley was considered clever and sharp, while that “ dear good woman,” her mother, was in reality loved and trusted, but spoken of with rather a slighting and patronising familiarity. So much for the stupidity of human opinion ! The fact was, that Mrs. Ashley was as superior

to her daughter in intelligence and taste, as she was in temper and modesty.

Sarah Ashley had an affectionate heart and a kind one; but so veiled and thwarted by caprice, touchiness, and vulgarity, that it was difficult to discover it. She was not the least clever; few persons had a more limited range of ideas: but she was sharp enough in detecting faults in others, and was blessed or cursed with a most retentive memory as to all that others would have most wished her to forget. She was one of those who would remind people of faults they had outgrown or corrected; not from malignity, but from a wish of making herself of importance for the moment. She rarely spoke of people unkindly behind their backs, but pleased herself in making them redden and feel uncomfortable before her: a way which causes many more enemies than the more insidious one. She would remind some gentle, placid woman, of some childish or girlish outbreak of passion in past years; some steady, persevering man, of some wild freak of his youth; some religious and devoted Dorcas, of some selfish frivolity long repented and atoned for. Sarah Ashley's tongue was dreaded, and its volubility and sharpness established for her a pseudo-reputation of ability. Her "Don't you remember?" scattered the assembled guests in a drawing-room or round a

tea-table with almost ludicrous rapidity. It is so difficult to meet attacks of this kind. The weapon is a truth, though rusty and inappropriate. One feels that a bad impression is made on the minds of strangers : but as there is no falsehood, one cannot parry it. Yet perhaps those who winced most beneath her biographical reminiscences, remembered *acts* of kindness performed by her in times of sorrow which took out the sting from some of her remarks, and prevented her being absolutely hated. Poor Sarah ! many were loved whose actions did not evince a tithe of the kindness of hers, but whose tongues, on the other hand, knew how to be still, or how to move inoffensively. From the obtuseness of her nature, she was not conscious of the harm she did. It would require some great catastrophe, consequent upon some ill-natured or spiteful remarks of hers, to bring her to such a sense of it as would paralyse the evil member, or at all events extricate its venom. Then she would make remarks that she thought singularly apposite and shrewd, but which caused weak-minded persons to feel awkward and uncomfortable. If a lady called at the Ferry with that fluttering conscious appearance of thinking herself well-dressed, peculiar to some women, she would examine her dress and exclaim on the cheapness of that particular fabric, or one *like it*. If walking with a friend, their attention

was called to some hideous solecism in bonnets or caps, exhibited in a shop window, she would stare full at the head-gear of the person she was with, and then turn to the offending specimen, and say, indulgently, "It is not so bad, after all; I *have* seen *some* more objectionable."

If a person, proud of her connections, spoke of some friend, she would interrupt them suddenly, "Mr. Nesbit; is not that the horse-dealer at Wroxton? No, I beg your pardon, some relative, I suppose." In short, Sarah Ashley was as disagreeable as a woman not actually bad-hearted could possibly be.

Another peculiarity of hers was, the rabid way in which she carried to its extremest consequence any theory which she adopted. It proceeded from the same obtuseness. If she was a convert to hydropathy, not only the house would be deluged with her perpetual baths, but every member of the house would be scolded, objurgated, threatened with the most fatal consequences, if they did not adopt it also. If benevolence was the order of the day, she bored every one to death with subscriptions for flannel, donations, soup tickets, schools; but the burden of her song, after her having extracted the money from others, was always, "*I have clothed, I have fed, I have taught.*"

If it were a religion of faith, rather than works,

which was the predominating notion of the hour, she was fairly insupportable. Such bitter views of the most innocent things, such wholesale condemnation, and such fierce vituperation of all whose creed was not precisely the same as the one she for the nonce professed, were really bordering on mania. On one of these occasions, Mrs. Ashley felt convinced that her daughter must be ill; she would not believe in any other interpretation. The doctor came, felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, conversed with her for a few minutes, and then left her, to report to her mother.

"Well, doctor?" asked Mrs. Ashley, anxiously.

"My dear madam," said the physician, without the shadow of a smile, "will you allow me to give you my serious opinion?"

"Certainly, Dr. Thorpe, certainly. Nothing serious, I hope, with regard to poor Sarah?"

"I will be explicit. Madam, my conviction is, that Miss Ashley's complaint is, religion upon bile, and bile upon religion; nothing more. This prescription will be, I trust, efficacious."

He handed her a prescription, in which an old-fashioned remedy figured largely, for he was an old-fashioned man, and took his leave.

These were the persons among whom Ivy was to be domiciled three months, and with whom Cordelia lived.

CHAPTER V.

“THE heart has its Sabbaths,” and Ivy Clayre woke the morning after her arrival at the Ferry with a spring of gladness in hers. Everything looked beautiful in the outer world, and in the inner one there was the brightness of a great joy. She dressed hastily, and was then going to knock at Cordelia’s door, but paused. She knew it was very early, and that Cordelia was delicate, and had been up to a late hour the previous night. Ivy would not disturb her.

She hesitated a little, and then thought she would go out. It was so delightful that all her easures should come together. This free enjoyment of nature—this full satisfaction to her heart’s need of affection!

It was fine, and she loitered among the flower-beds and touched the flowers. She gathered one rose and put it in her dress. After an hour’s stroll she thought she would venture back through the open door of the dining-room. She saw that breakfast was prepared, and, to her surprise, Cordelia entered through an opposite one.

Ivy ran in.

"Are you so early? I was afraid of waking you." She kissed her. Just as she did so the other members of the family came in.

"You have made acquaintance with Cordelia, then?" said Mr. Ashley.

Before Ivy could reply, Cordelia answered coldly, "Yes;" and turning from Ivy, took a seat by the table next her mother. Ivy was a little confused at the entrance of all the family, and did not notice the coldness of the answer. When she looked at her sister-in-law, she was struck with her excessive paleness. So it seemed was Mrs. Ashley.

"How imprudent, my dear child, to have come down for breakfast the very first day you have been up at all."

"I must make a beginning," said Cordelia, and her voice seemed changed to-day. Last night it was so sweet and low: it was hard and metallic now.

Miss Ashley looked keenly at her sister and then at Ivy, but made no remark.

The letters were brought in. If it were possible, Cordelia turned paler than she was before.

"No letters for you, Cordelia. What a bad correspondent your brother is," said Mr. Ashley, turning to Ivy.

"He writes very rarely to me," answered Ivy;

"but it is not possible to have letters from him yet."

"The mail from Alexandria has come in."

"He may not have been in time."

While Ivy was apologising for Gerard, Cordelia maintained a resolute silence.

When they had done breakfast, Mr. Ashley asked Ivy if she would like to go with him now to the sea-shore. She gladly assented, and went to fetch her hat.

When she came down-stairs again the dining-room was empty.

Their drive was pleasant.

Mr. Ashley was not a highly-educated man, but he was shrewd and had a direct straightforward manner which carried a certain impressiveness with it.

After he had described some of the country places to Ivy, and they had given the horse and chaise to the groom's care (he was with them), they walked up and down the smooth white sands.

At first Ivy's attention was absorbed by the ripple of the tiny little waves which literally kissed the shore, with watching the great sparkling scintillating sheet of water which dazzled her eyes as she looked, and in noticing the small shells at her feet; but soon the sound of familiar names roused her to listen to what Mr. Ashley was speaking about.

"But I *am* one of you; is not Cordelia my sister?" said Ivy. She felt a sympathy with this rough imperious man.

He smiled quite kindly down upon her. "Then you do not mind coming to us; our ways are simple and countrified, not like yours, but I for one will do all I can to make you happy."

"Mr. Ashley," said Ivy, with one of her direct looks, "I do not like you to speak as if our ways, as you call them, were different from yours, except that we have not half such a nice house, and live in a street instead of in this beautiful country. But you know we are very poor, and if it were not for Aunt Anne I should be a beggar. It makes me uncomfortable when I hear Miss Ashley speak so.

"Sarah! Oh, you must not mind her; she is soured, poor girl; it is but natural, though I do not think she is quite right in her fears, but she thinks I have been unjust to her in Cordelia's behalf. I tell her I would have done the same for her, but she wants nothing of me but pin-money, and more's the pity. But it is getting late, we must go home." They turned their backs on the sea, over which some broad shadows now rested as if some huge bird were shadowing it with his wings, and went to the carriage.

"Is there no other way to the sea-shore but this?"

"Yes, there is another, but I do not advise you to try it till you have become quite a country lady. You must clamber several styles, a five-barred gate, very steep and rather rickety, and then a very precipitate slippery path takes you to the sea."

Ivy laughed. "I am a much better walker than you think. I shall try one of these days."

When they reached home it was just dinner time. Ivy had barely time to take off her hat and smooth her hair when the gong sounded for dinner.

She met Cordelia as she went down.

"Have you had a pleasant drive?" she asked eagerly, and looking with a penetrating glance at Ivy's face, as if she tried to find out by its expression what they had been talking of.

"So pleasant," said Ivy, "it was lovely by the sea-shore. Oh Cordelia, how delightful it will be when you are strong enough to go there too."

Cordelia shrank back.

When they were at dinner, Mr. Ashley's good humour had a happy influence on all. Mrs. Ashley looked serenely content, and there

was no opportunity for Sarah's uncomfortable remarks.

Ivy felt more at her ease. She thought she had a majority of allies in the family now, whatever Miss Ashley might feel towards her. There was Cordelia, Mr. Ashley, and Mrs. Ashley, who if not positively an ally was certainly no enemy. Her spirits rose, and she was her own bright, cheerful self.

She noticed that Cordelia was very silent, but her look of suffering explained it.

"Are you tired? or will you accompany my mother and myself this afternoon? We are going to the Manor and the Rectory."

Ivy had a vision of an afternoon alone with Cordelia, and answered, "I am not tired, but I think I will stay at home this afternoon. I shall begin my letter to Aunt Anne."

After dinner, accordingly, Ivy went to her own room to begin her letter. After a certain time there was such stillness in the house she thought she would knock at her sister's door and ask her to let her sit with her.

She knocked two or three times without reply. She opened the door gently, wondering at the silence. The room was empty. Ivy looked round but she saw no trace of even recent occupation. She wondered to herself, and then went down to the drawing-room. It was also empty.

Though there were no books on the table, there was a piano, and she mechanically went towards it. It was closed, but a music stand near was literally overflowing with music.

Ivy looked at it. It was of the most varied description — Schubert, Verdi, Mendelssohn, Rossini, Mozart, Bellini, Beethoven, Haydn, Purcell, Arne, Cherubini—there was not a great name in music which was not represented there.

“ These must be Cordelia’s,” she thought.

She retreated to her own room somewhat disappointed, and continued her letter.

She knew her Aunt Anne detested what she called exaggeration and excitement. She confined herself, therefore, to the barest statement of facts. Aunt Anne used to say Ivy was the worst letter-writer in the whole world. So she was, *to her Aunt Anne*. She often forgot the date of her letter, omitted the chief item of news, and wrote very illegibly; but, given a correspondent to whom she could have opened her heart, and Ivy’s letters would have been amusing, spirited, graphic.

She put it down, for it was heavy work, and it was not to go till the day after.

She was less buoyant than in the morning. She had seen, but had scarcely spoken to her new friend. She drew her seat to the window, and opened a little pocket edition of

"Shelley" which was in her box. She was just repeating to herself, with murmuring delight, those verses—

Arethusa arose
From her couch of snows, &c., &c.

when the stillness was broken by a strain of music which made her start to her feet.

There was first an accompaniment played in a masterly manner, and then a clear rich soprano voice began "Casta Diva."

Ivy listened with amazement. She had once been to the Opera, and it seemed to her that Grisi herself had not a greater flexibility or a more liquid richness of tone. In the whole manner there was nothing of amateurship. Even Ivy's inexperience could recognise this. It was an artist who was singing.

Drawn as by a spell by that beautiful melody, she listened, first standing, then she moved slowly towards the door, went down stairs, and found herself almost unconsciously at the drawing-room door. It was but partially closed. She opened it. There at the piano sat Cordelia. She turned round, and was on her feet in a minute.

"Do not tell them you have heard me sing," she said; "I have never sang to them since I returned home."

She was tremulous with eagerness.

"I will do whatever you wish, Cordelia, but do not let me interrupt you. Pray sing again."

"I think not. I have been startled. Well, I will try." For Ivy looked so disappointed, and almost hurt, that she felt it would be an unkindness not to comply with her wish.

She sat down and sang Meyerbeer's "Fisher-maiden."

It was wonderful. Ivy had no special faculty for music in herself, but, like all sensitive natures, it had an extraordinary influence over her, and the effect of this grand voice was not, as is reproached to music in general, enervating. On the contrary, there was something virile in it which appealed to depths in her nature of which till now she was quite unconscious—a power of resistance, of overcoming, of triumph, which filled her eyes with tears.

When Cordelia had finished there was not a word said. She put by her music, and took a seat by the window. Ivy did not move, but sat with her eyes fixed on her sister. The book, the picture, the song, which has first stirred the depths of our nature, and revealed to us the Hell, or the Purgatory, or the Paradise we all bear within us, is at once set apart and hallowed for ever.

While they were thus sitting silently together,

the noise of wheels announced the return of the others.

"What could induce you, Cordelia, to go out this evening?" said Miss Ashley crossly.

"I felt inclined for a walk."

"One day you are too ill to move from your room, the next you are able to walk a couple of miles."

Mr. Ashley looked at his youngest daughter, but on second thoughts checked what he had to say.

"We heard of your being out, at the post-office; we might surely have posted your letters for you. But don't you remember how, even as a little girl, you liked solitary and mysterious expeditions?"

"I was inclined for a walk, and posting my letters gave me an object; that was why I went in that direction."

"You should have taken some one with you, my dear," said Mrs. Ashley.

"My dear mother, I assure you I feel better to-day."

No more was said at the time, though Miss Ashley looked fidgety and suspicious.

After a time Cordelia rose and bade them good-night.

"I am rather tired, I confess, Sarah," she said, "and I am going to bed early, that I may have a long rest."

"Don't be afraid, I shall not disturb you," blurted out Miss Ashley.

Ivy was disappointed. She hoped to have had the pleasure of another visit to Cordelia's room that night.

When her sister-in-law had left the room, Miss Ashley asked her if she knew whether Cordelia had written to her husband.

"I do not know," said Ivy, conscious that she blushed crimson at the question.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO or three weeks passed. By some contrivance, that even Ivy felt was premeditated, she never met Cordelia alone. And yet the more she saw of her, the more was she drawn to her, as by a magnetic attraction. Cordelia did not distinguish Ivy in any way, and was much more reserved in manner towards her than the other members of the Ashley family were; but Ivy felt that she often looked at her with a strange, wistful, yearning gaze; and in the discussions or conversations that took place, when Cordelia made some allusion or uttered some sentiment somewhat above her audience, she turned invariably to Ivy, as if certain that by her she would be understood. She was very sweet and affectionate in her manner towards her mother; very patient with the ill-tempered, exacting, vulgar Miss Ashley; and attentive and respectful towards her father: but the sadness on her face seemed to increase. Was it that no Indian letters came to the Ferry?

About a month after Ivy's arrival, a letter was

forwarded to her from London from her brother. It was very brief and hurried:—"Dear I.,—One line to tell you we landed yesterday. I am to be sent up the country with the first battalion, and that leaves in two days, and I have half a hundred things to buy and get ready. Love to all. I have not heard from England since I left. Please to write regularly, and tell me all the news. Things are very different in reality from what we once imagined they would be; and India does not overflow with milk and honey, as we fancied it would. But I suppose it is the fate of all things to look less beautiful in the present. The past is always dear, and the future always seems enchanting; it is only to-day that is ugly, and that we hate. Adieu. G. C."

Ivy said nothing about this letter, but after she had read it, took an opportunity of placing it in Cordelia's room.

Cordelia complained of a headache, and did not dine down-stairs that day. When she came down after dinner she looked pale, and her eyes were heavy, but she was unchanged in manner.

During the evening, the conversation turned on the impossibility of women earning money, and the necessity of parents providing for *them*, instead of doing, as so many did, bestow a bare pittance on their daughters, and concentrate their fortunes on their sons. A neighbour who had

lately died, leaving his farm to his son and his blessing to his daughters, was the subject of their discourse.

"It is very unjust," said Ivy; "but women *can* earn money."

"How?" asked Miss Ashley, wrathfully.

"They can teach."

"Certainly, and receive twenty pounds a year for work which would tell on the strongest man. Governesses wear out sooner than any other class of persons, in health, in brain, in temper. Their end is invariably a mad-house, or an alms-house. The Serpentine in London is paved with their dead bodies. It makes me shudder to think of them."

"I know," said Ivy, "they are overworked, and poorly paid,—there is bad management somewhere; but still it is a profession,—a means of earning money. Then there are artists and actresses and singers, and now some women are studying medicine—"

"Medicine! Bless us!" said Mr. Ashley.

"And then they might keep shops. It seems to me," continued Ivy, "that there are a good many ways, if they chose; and that the very reason which causes governesses to suffer so much and to earn so little, is the mistaken notion that to be a governess is the only profession for women."

"There is not one person," said Cordelia, "who, if asked, would not consider it better to make a governess of his daughter than an actress. Yet an actress can make a fortune, and a governess can with difficulty accumulate the most limited independence."

"I would rather see a daughter of mine in her coffin than on the stage," said Mr. Ashley, looking fixedly at Cordelia.

"I know it," said Cordelia, quietly. "Men scornfully say women cannot earn money, and yet deny them the means of doing so. There is a positive veto on the stage; there is a prejudice against authoresses; there is suspicion against an artist, lest she may have attained proficiency by studies which are considered outside the limitations of her sex; shop-keeping is a degradation; service is stigmatised as menial;—in fact, it seems that men have made a division of the action of the verb,—they *do*, and they leave it to women to suffer."

"Humbug," muttered Mr. Ashley, who had the profoundest disbelief in women as bread-earners.

One thing must be said for him, that though he was a hopeless heretic as to the creed of woman's labour and woman's mission, he was—for this very reason perhaps—tender and courteous towards them in no common degree. In

all journeys he instinctively assumed the post of guardian to those who were alone, and seemed helpless, not only when by chance they were pretty and young, but always and to all. This unbelief in them made the "strong-minded" consider him an "odious monster;" but even they could not deny some traitorous weakness which made it pleasant to be waited on, sheltered, and taken care of by this frank, genial, burly man.

"In this case," said Mrs. Ashley, "poor Mr. Norris could scarcely help himself,—the bulk of his little property must keep up the farm. His eldest son takes the management of it, and his mother and her younger children will live on it; but he cannot support his three elder sisters besides,—they must go out as governesses."

"Are they fit to be governesses?" said Cordelia.

"As fit as anyone else," answered Miss Ashley.

This was an unanswerable argument, and the conversation dropped.

Ivy thought to herself she wished she had such a shield against ill-fortune as Cordelia's voice. What might not that voice gain, if it were pressed into its owner's service as a pecuniary aid. She was too young to think much of the future as regarded her own fate; but it *did* strike her that if her aunt died she would be as

portionless as the Misses Norris. Was she, in her own estimation, fit to be a governess?

Some days after this conversation, the subjects of it paid a visit to the Ferry. Two of them were very ordinary young women; the youngest looked more sensible and more amiable.

After some preliminary condolences, which the breadth of their crape and the sable of their paramattas answered, without giving the two elder ones the trouble of manifesting much grief in their countenances, they began talking of their plans.

"Have you settled anything, my dears?" asked kind Mrs. Ashley.

"We have been fortunate,—that is, Emma and I have: the Vicar has obtained us situations,—one at Brighton, and one at Manchester. I am going to Brighton; I am told it is a very gay place. We have thirty pounds a year each. I am to teach English and French and music to five girls, from the ages of six to fourteen. The father is a wine-merchant." She spoke as if she was repeating a lesson by rote.

"And I am going as under-teacher in a school at Manchester. It is very hard, for I hate children; but what can one do?" and the tears sprang to her eyes.

"And you?" asked Miss Ashley of the younger daughter.

"Lucy is too bad," said the one called Emma; "she wishes to disgrace us all. Mr. Payne would have helped her also to a situation, but she would not take it."

"I could not," said Lucy, with a blush; "I really do not feel it would be right. I cannot teach,—I know so little. I should be so miserable, trying to do right, and feeling so ignorant how to do it. It is my fault, I know."

"Then what do you think of?"

"I would do anything. I know the necessity of it. I would take in needle-work."

Cordelia raised her head, and looked at her attentively.

"I can work," continued Lucy.

"Pshaw!" said her sister, "how much would you get at that?"

"Sometimes at shops they require a woman to wait behind the counter——"

"Just hear her," said Emma Norris, "isn't it provoking?"

"I want to do my best," said Lucy, still more earnestly; "but how can I undertake what I know I cannot perform. There *must* be some other way. In two or three years I might be able to teach, but now I know I am not capable of it. I must learn a good deal more first."

"Would you dislike taking a situation as a nursery governess?" said Cordelia. "You know

it is very little better than being an upper nurse."

"I dare say she would like that," said Miss Norris; and she whispered audibly to Miss Ashley, "I cannot think where she gets her low tastes."

"Come with me," said Cordelia kindly, and they left the room together.

After a few minutes, they returned. Lucy's face looked beaming with gratitude, and soon after the family took their leave.

"What did you do to Lucy to make her so happy, my love?" said Mrs. Ashley.

"I had heard of some persons going abroad who wanted a nursery governess, and I gave Lucy the address, and told her to apply for the situation. The Vicar would answer any inquiries, I am sure."

"I wonder at you, Cordelia," said Miss Ashley, "encouraging a girl in such folly,—making a servant of her!"

"I think, Sarah, Lucy has a better chance, beginning life with what she can really accomplish, than if she aimed higher."

"It was very kind of you, Cordelia," said Mrs. Ashley, "and now they are no longer on their mother's hands, poor woman. I am sure you must be pleased at that, Sarah."

Sarah shrugged her shoulders, and was silent.

Cordelia was kinder than anyone knew. That situation was the only answer to an advertisement she had sent, offering herself as a governess, nursery governess, companion, or lady's-maid to any family going abroad. It was the first stepping-stone to the fulfilment of her resolution of leaving England, and yet she had voluntarily deprived herself of it for the sake of another.

"She needed it more immediately, if not more, than I did," thought Cordelia. Her heart was capable of all these heroic self-abnegations and self-immolations for others. Would that it had been as capable of that highest self-renunciation of all—the putting aside a just resentment—the divine self-sacrifice of forgiveness: not forgiveness in the ordinary common-place sense—of seeking no revenge—of expressing no anger,—but that forgiveness which blots out the offence as well as pardons the offender.

A few days later, she had a grateful letter of acknowledgment from Lucy. She had obtained the situation, and was going abroad directly with the lady who had engaged her.

Was it in furtherance of this resentment that she still maintained a distance towards Ivy. Ivy was inexpressibly pained. There was a barrier between them which she felt had not been that first night. A silken fold may, cunningly disposed, bar the way as effectually as

a stone rampart. It seems to yield, but is not to be broken. It requires a sword as keen as Saladin's to cut through it, and this sword came to Ivy's aid in the shape of an accident.

It was her custom to take long walks, and, whenever it was possible, by herself. Miss Ashley generally insisted upon accompanying her, but was sometimes called away by other duties. There was something so exacting, so suspicious, so narrow-minded about Sarah Ashley, that Ivy had no pleasure in her society. Her good qualities she could see. She was kind-hearted, though not good-natured, which is a difference not sufficiently dwelt on. In ordinary life she was captious and irritable, asking disagreeable questions, and often giving most unsatisfactory replies when questions were asked of her; but illness, real suffering, want, always moved her to compassion. She was more liked by her inferiors than her equals. In her relations with the first, the good part of her nature was called out. She felt that to them she was benevolent, and this diffused a pleasantness in her own mind which re-acted again on them. She would have explained this by saying there was no "nonsense" in them, and therefore she could sympathise with them. With people of her own standing she felt at a disadvantage, and this soured her at once. She was fond of her

mother ; but Mrs. Ashley's invariable placidity rendered it difficult for anyone to quarrel with her. There was so little to cavil at in that gentleness which was equal to all. With her father it was different. He was more like herself, though of a broader, stronger intellect and nature ; but he was passionate, hasty, and severe. He easily took offence, and rarely forgave it. The softest parts of his nature turned towards Cordelia. He had been so proud of his beautiful child. He had even shown an unjust partiality towards her, which had excited the bitter jealousy of his eldest daughter, and that jealousy still existed.

The remarkable thing, however, was that, jealous, snappish, bitter, as Miss Ashley was to Cordelia, she was the only being for whom she felt strong affection. Had Cordelia evinced any preference for her sister, Sarah would have become her champion against the whole world ; but Cordelia could not. The wide disparity which nature and education had made entirely precluded this. She deplored having been the cause of what Sarah supposed was a wrong to her, and she estimated her fairly and candidly, but it was not a pleasure to be with her, and this feeling could not be concealed, and galled Sarah intensely. At first she had anticipated that a great intimacy would have sprung up between her sister and Ivy. She was therefore

pleasantly surprised to find that this was not the case. Afterwards, with her usual facility in self-tormenting, she imagined that there was some mystery in it, and in her love of interpreting in the most painful manner all that was doubtful, she concluded that Ivy's relatives, had advised her against becoming too intimate with Cordelia or her family. She lashed herself with this imaginary scourge till she produced a permanent irritation in her own mind against Ivy, and this was visited on Cordelia as the first cause of their contact with these "odious" people. She could not prevent, however, Ivy from becoming a kind of favourite of her father's. Something of masculine gallantry was felt by Mr. Ashley towards Ivy. He used to say she looked like a rose newly gathered at his breakfast-table, and there was something soothing to his pride in this bud from the stem of the proud "Capulet" looking on him with such cordial regard, and so evidently enjoying herself in his house.

The great necessity of Ivy's life was freedom. She had never enjoyed it in the smallest degree hitherto. Except at night, and during her morning's preparation for her studies, she had never been alone. She had never given herself to the charm of a book without having to stop and answer some irrelevant questions in the middle of the most interesting passages. She

had never sat by the window, giving up her heart to those Fata Morgana reveries in which the young so often indulge, when through the golden clouds of the future one sees a maze of towers and temples, among which we dream will be our portion, but she was gently told by Aunt Anne to fetch her crochet, or her knitting, or her tapestry. Idleness, was stigmatised as the unpardonable sin in Ivy's education.

It may be supposed how she enjoyed this holiday time, and of what infinite benefit it was to her. She rambled about, she sat for hours in her own room, she drove out with Mr. Ashley,—all at her own sweet will. But for Miss Ashley's unwelcome presence occasionally, and the little ache at her heart at the downfall, as she supposed, of her dreams about Cordelia, Ivy would have been perfectly happy.

She had answered Gerard's letter by one in which she had described her arrival, her reception by the Ashleys, and the impression she had received from Cordelia's exquisite beauty. "You did not say half enough, dear Gerard, about her. I suppose you thought I was too young to understand, but I *do* understand how you must love her. She is different from anyone I have ever seen,—a line of poetry in a world of prose. I always think of poetry when I look at her. She seems very sad, and never speaks of you, or tells

me when she hears of you. She is very kind to me, but I see very little of her,—indeed, she lives almost entirely by herself. I think sometimes I remind her too much of you for it to be pleasant to see much of me. I often find her looking at me with very earnest, mournful eyes. I am, you know, very like you,—a very plain likeness, I know,—but there is some resemblance, I believe.”

Ivy had been about a month at the Ferry, when a whim seized her one morning to try her way to the sea-shore by the steep path. Sarah was fortunately bound on some Lady Bountiful expedition in the neighbourhood, and Mr. Ashley had an engagement with a tenant. Cordelia, as usual, had vanished directly after breakfast.

Ivy stepped out gaily, and laughed to herself as she found she was country lady enough to go over the styles, to climb the rickety gate with perfect precision, and that her foot did not slip down the precipitous path more than was necessary to give impetus to her run down the hill. How she enjoyed it when she did reach the shore!

We call ourselves children of the earth, but how many of us are just as much children of the water! What can give such a sense of invigorating enjoyment as a walk close by the sea? How that saline effluence enters with

piquant and racy force into our very pulses! With what a syren voice it draws us closer and closer to her embrace! The plunge which Mentor gave Telemachus into the Ægean, to free him from Calypso's enchantments, was full compensation. Depend on it, as the blue crystal opened, some face of wild beauty, with corals and purple madrepore woven in her glittering hair, looked up from the depths and kissed the boy-lover on his lips, till he forgot his sorceress mistress.

The colour deepened in Ivy's cheeks, her eyes were brighter and brighter, and all sorts of childish plays and freaks came into her head. She put her hands into the little tiny waves, and held the water in her small white palms; she flung stones as far as she could reach; at last, impelled by the very elf of childish mischief, she took off her boots and stockings, and paddled among the rocks.

It was very cockneyish and babyish, I acknowledge; but both charges were deserved. Ivy was a London damsel, born and bred, and more childish in some respects at sixteen than most girls at twelve. Uncongenial discipline always retards the development, if it does not thwart it.

It was such a solitary part of the shore, that Ivy could indulge herself to her heart's content. But while she was thus amusing herself, and

walking ankle-deep in water, she had unconsciously advanced towards some rocks which barred further progress. She sat down on a low one, and looked out into the blue plain, melting into the still bluer distance, before her. While she thus sat, resting herself for a few moments, she suddenly heard some one moving beside her, but farther on the other side of the jutting rock.

She was a little startled, for though a brave girl, and not easily roused to a sensation of fear, an inexpressible feeling of shame crimsoned her cheek, to think that while she deemed she had been in entire solitude, she had been observed. She waited a minute to hear it again, when then and there suddenly stood up, separated from her only by the ledge of rock on which she sat, on one side, and against which he stood, on the other, a boy of about eighteen, but so ragged, torn, and dirty, looking so swarthy in brow and eyes and hair, that she could not refrain from an exclamation of fear, and rose, in spite of her naked feet, to return home.

He spoke to her. She could not speak Italian, but she understood enough to be aware that he entreated her to stop and listen to him. At first she was not inclined to do so; but there was so much entreaty in his voice, that she lingered in spite of herself.

He asked her if she knew where a house called Brookferry was ?

She pointed to the direction in which it stood. She said it was three miles from the shore, on that side.

His next question was, what was the hour ?

She thought he was trifling with her for some bad object, and turned away resolutely, but he stopped her again.

"Is there a lady at the Ferry called La Signora Cordelia ? "

"Yes."

She was rooted to the spot now.

He had a letter for her, but it was too late for him to take it ; he had only a day-ticket, and must be at the station at three o'clock. It must be one now, and he could not walk to the Ferry and back to the station in time. What was he to do ?

"But why did not you take it yourself ? The train must have arrived two hours ago, and there was time then."

The boy blushed.

"I was told not to go to the house, but to wait."

Ivy turned pale.

"Give me the letter," she said.

He drew out of his ragged waistcoat a pocket-book, out of which he drew the letter. It was duly directed, "Madame Cordelia Clayre," but

there was no other address. Ivy took it, and, with an impulse she could not resist, put five shillings into the boy's hand, and ran as quickly as she could, down the rocks. She cut her poor bare feet in several places, but would not stop to put on her feet-gear till she had turned towards the precipitous path which led to the five-barred gate. When she paused breathless to do so, she found to her dismay that she held the stockings safely enough, but had either dropped or forgotten the little boots.

The village-clocks striking two warned her there was little time to return, and she had besides an uncomfortable feeling at the thought of again meeting her Italian acquaintance. She paused for a moment, and looked rather compassionately at her poor feet, but there was no help for it, she must get on as well as she could, or return to fetch them. She decided to do so, and ran down again to the rocks, looking on all sides as she ran. On the way there was no trace of them, and by the time she reached the rocks, already almost covered with water, she had the pleasure of seeing them floating gracefully out of reach. She could not help laughing, though it was certainly very provoking. She tore her handkerchief in two pieces, and tied them as tight as she could, sandal fashion, round her ankles, and set off again.

The precaution she had taken saved her feet a little, but somewhat impeded her powers of walking. She made the greatest haste she could, and was yet in hopes of arriving by the dinner-hour, half-past two. She congratulated herself that there was a back way to the house, through which she could enter, and repair the deficiencies in her attire without attracting attention. But, alas! Ivy was not the only person whose thoughts make a spring from the desired to the attained, without pausing to consider the chances of the gulf between. She set her feet on the rickety gate with great care, but they were stiffer and less firm than in the morning, and the effort was proportionably more difficult. She scrambled up, however, and was trying to slip—she could no longer jump—from the last lofty bar, when it suddenly gave way, and she fell with all her weight on the ground. She was stunned for a moment, but recovered herself after a few minutes, and then began to sit up, and finally tried to stand. This she found was not possible; her ankle had been bent under her in the fall, and was violently strained, if not sprained. The pain was acute. Poor Ivy was in dismay; the sickening throbs of pain from the disabled limb made her eyes fill. She heard half-past two, and after a time which seemed infinitely long, three sounded from the different



clocks in succession, and she still sat helpless there. She at last managed to crawl to the side of a hedge, and from thence, with really heroic fortitude, tried to hobble onwards. She sought to give herself courage by repeating her favourite verses, by marking out little stations, and giving herself a certain rest at each: but it was useless, brave as she was, poor girl! There are limits to human endurance, and she had only reached the first style, when she stumbled again, and the pain this time was so overpowering that she fainted away.

Poor wingless Psyche! this was a mournful end to her day of happiness.

She was restored to her senses by a feeling of intolerable agony. She opened her eyes and found Mr. Ashley bending over her, while on the other side stood the Italian boy she had parted from by the shore.

"How did it happen, my dear? I cannot make out what that fool of a boy says; but he did bring me here. So far, I did make that out. Confound his jargon!"

"I missed the bar of the style, and fell," murmured poor Ivy.

The Italian boy was looking at her with great compassion, and told her, half in broken English half in Italian, that he had seen her come down again to the rocks, to look for something, as it

seemed to him ; that he thought she had lost the letter, and he had looked and looked for it ; that then, after some time spent in his search in vain, he had followed, and had, not knowing the direct path, only come in time to see that she had fainted. He was running to try if he could get any water for her, and had met Mr. Ashley.

He and Mr. Ashley now tried to lift her, with great care, but the injured foot was hanging, and the weight, for it was much swollen, was more than she could support.

" Oh, my foot ! " she said, and her senses gave way again.

" Poor child ! " said Mr. Ashley, who, with the boy's aid, now supported the ankle, and carried her with great care through the field to a part of it where the carriage waited. He deposited her in it, and drove quickly home, without a thought on the poor boy who stood looking after them.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN Ivy awoke she was in her bed ; it was late in the evening. Mrs. Ashley was in the room, and hearing Ivy move, she rose and went to her.

"Can you see Mr. Frampton now, dear ? I would not wake you before."

Ivy looked bewildered. Mrs. Ashley touched the bell.

"Mr. Ashley brought you home. He had gone to meet you, knowing you had gone the steep road to the sea-shore ; and as he looked across the fields to see if you were coming, he met some one who told him where to find you. We got you into bed as soon as we could, and you have slept ever since. We sent for the surgeon ; but he has only been here five minutes."

Ivy remembered now the agony she had felt in the carriage, and the sensation of comfort when she was placed in the cool, soft sheets ; but nothing more. She found she was undressed. Her clothes were on a chair near her, and her hair and brow were wet with eau-de-cologne.

"We bathed your feet, too; they were so swollen and sandy. How was it? But I will not make you talk; here comes Mr. Frampton."

He had only been told the young lady was supposed to have sprained her ankle in endeavouring to get over the Painton stile.

He examined the foot—looked seriously at it: it was very much swollen and discoloured.

"What are these cuts?"

"They have nothing to do with the sprain," said Ivy quickly.

He ordered the usual remedies, and promised to return in the morning; meanwhile, urging entire quiet for the nerves, and perfect immobility for the foot.

"I am so sorry to give you so much trouble," said Ivy.

"We are so sorry you are hurt."

"At this instant the door opened, and Miss Ashley entered. She had only just returned, for she still had on her cloak and her bonnet. She looked quite sorry.

"Let me bring you some tea," she said; "it will refresh you."

"Thank you. I do feel very giddy and weak. It may do me good."

Miss Ashley went down to prepare it. Meanwhile Cordelia came in; and Mrs. Ashley, promising to return soon, left her.



"My poor Ivy," she said, putting her cool hand on Ivy's hot cheek, "what a terrible accident!"

Ivy's eyes filled with tears. It was the Cordelia of her first dream who spoke.

"I shall soon be better," she said tremulously.

Cordelia looked as agitated as herself.

"You must tell me all about it."

"Cordelia," said Ivy, sitting up, with a flushed face, "I have a letter for you; given me by an Italian boy."

At this moment Miss Ashley returned with the tea. She placed it on the bed.

Ivy sank back on her pillows, and began to drink it.

"I will put your room in order" said Miss Ashley, looking a silent reproach at Cordelia for not having already done it. Cordelia stood by the bed looking at Ivy. Sarah began arranging the room, and then went to the chair to clear it of the dress and clothes that were on it.

Again Ivy started up. "Do not touch those, Miss Ashley," she said in a gasping voice. "Don't trouble yourself."

"I will shake out your dress and hang it up," said Miss Ashley, not heeding her.

Ivy felt that in doing so the letter would fall out. She was in despair, and looked at Cordelia; but Cordelia did not understand.

Miss Ashley was just, in a preliminary way, putting her hand into the pocket of the dress, when Ivy, goaded to desperation, got out of bed, and took the dress from her hand.

"Good heavens! Are you mad? You will kill yourself!" said Miss Ashley. "What do you want?"

But Ivy had got her handkerchief, with the letter in it, in her hand; and had just strength to crawl back and fall on the bed. She felt Cordelia raise her, place her with the greatest care in the bed, and then sink down in a chair by her side.

"How very imprudent you are. Surely you might have asked me," Miss Ashley said. But at that moment her eyes fell on Ivy's face, and something in its expression revealed to her that some motive, strong enough to explain and require the exertion, had prompted her. She looked at her sister; Cordelia's eyes were almost closed, and her lips were quite white; but there was nothing to be made of these symptoms. There was a secret; but it was probably Ivy's alone. She put the room in order, and then sat down also.

The pain was much increased by this sudden impulse of Ivy's; and though she tried hard to command herself, she could not help the tears slowly dropping from her eyes.



"You have made yourself worse. I told you so. Shall I send for Frampton again?"

"No; I shall soon be better. I will try to sleep."

Cordelia looked up. "I will stay with her, Sarah; and if she is worse, I will let you all know down-stairs."

"I can sit here," said Miss Ashley. "You are not well yourself, and two are more than enough, unless, indeed, I interfere ——"

A feeble cry of pain from Ivy stopped her. She felt that bitter speeches were out of place at this moment.

"Very well, then, send for me, if you want me. Pray, Miss Clayre, do not dream of moving again. You may have retarded your recovery for weeks by this carelessness,"

At last she left the room.

"Here is your letter, Cordelia," said Ivy.

Cordelia did not take it directly; she stooped down and kissed Ivy. That kiss was the seal of a life-long affection.

"I will tell you."

"No," said Cordelia, "tell me nothing; but try to sleep."

Cordelia's voice was as sweet as music. The unnatural reserve was all gone; and Ivy, as she gradually felt lulled to rest by the monotonous motion of the hand which stroked hers, had a sweet sense of sisterly love at her heart. What-

ever had been the cause of the apparent chill between them, it was past now; and Cordelia felt drawn to her in the same strong, undefinable, and attractive manner that she did towards Cordelia.

When Ivy was fast asleep, Cordelia took out her letter and read it. It was a long letter, and she read it over twice before she folded it up again. Evidently it was not a pleasant communication.

It was nearly midnight when Ivy awoke. The room was darkened; but there was the gleam of a rushlight in it. Cordelia still sate by her side.

"How do you feel, Ivy?"

"Very feverish and confused, and my whole body aches."

"Poor child!"

"I am afraid I shall be quite ill, besides the sprain. I had better tell you at once how I got the letter, for my head seems more and more strange."

"If it will relieve you, tell me; and then I will give you something to make you sleep again."

"I was amusing myself on the beach, when an Italian boy asked me first the way here, and then, finding it very late, and that he could not get here before the train left for London again, he asked me to give you that letter or send it to you. He said it was of great importance."

"It is not of great importance," said Cordelia;

"but it was very kind of you to bring it. I only fear, my poor Ivy, you have hurt yourself in doing so; and that is very painful to me."

"What a mysterious being you are, Cordelia."

"I seem so," said Cordelia in an agitated voice. "I who love truth and outspokenness, and transparency of life above all things else, am nearly choked in this atmosphere of reserves, and all but deceptions, which others impose on me. That letter was simply an invitation; and required an immediate answer, as the writer was to leave England to-day. I have sent the reply by railroad." But good-night, love; try to sleep again."

Ivy obeyed her like a little child.

A day or two was spent in this half-mazed, half-unconscious state; during which the others of the family passed before her eyes like shadows in a dream; but Ivy was always sensible of Cordelia's presence, responded to the touch of her hand, and smiled faintly when Cordelia addressed her. After that time she began to get better—was able to sit up in bed, and then, supported by pillows, to be lifted into the drawing-room.

Cordelia did not take a prominent part in the nursing after that first night; but once or twice in the afternoons when Ivy and she were alone, without being asked, she went to the piano and sang some of her favourite songs.

"With such a voice as that, you must be independent of everything," said Ivy. "I envy you. If I had it, I would be a singer, and make my fortune."

"That is just what I am going to do," said Cordelia.

"Be a singer?"

"Yes."

"Leave the Ferry?"

"Yes."

"And Gerard?"

Cordelia did not answer. The music-books were closed, and the conversation dropped.



CHAPTER VIII.

ONE summer evening, about a month after her sprain, Ivy was helped out by Cordelia, and an easy-chair and footstool being arranged on the lawn under a great walnut-tree, she was deposited there to enjoy the beauty of the sunset.

An English sunset, with its soft hues blending into gorgeous and opaque brightness on the horizon, and vanishing into clear grey overhead. Not that transparent and glittering flame which decks "the occident in the lovely land," but it is as fair, and almost more winning. There is a pathos about a beautiful sky in England, a tenderness in its blue, and a veiled beauty which touches as well as charms; in Italy there is a supreme and royal magnificence which enchants, but almost awes.

Cordelia sat near Ivy. Mr. and Mrs. Ashley were walking up and down the broad gravel-walk which separated the lawn from the house.

"How fond Miss Clayre seems of Cordelia," said Mrs. Ashley.

"Yes, that's an honest lass—with fewer whims

than most women have—she does seem to like Cordelia.”

“I am so glad to see it, for it may be of use to Cordelia. Miss Clayre may overcome the prejudices of Sir Arthur and her aunt.”

“No chance of that. Sir Arthur is a fool, if nothing worse; and, to say the truth, his grandson is much the same. Miss Clayre has more sense, and I am glad she likes Cordelia; but as to her brother—” A very emphatic exclamation concluded the sentence.

“I think, Ashley, you are too severe. I have only seen Gerard Clayre once, but if ever a man loved woman, he loves Cordelia. You said so yourself at the time.”

“Loves—tut—the sort of love which I for one hold very cheap I tell you. Where has he shown his love? In leaving her? In never writing a line? Is she not, in fact, separated from him? By George, I wish I could tell him a piece of my mind.” Mr. Ashley ground his stick deep into the path, and then muttered, “Mrs. Vibert has much to answer for.”

“Ellinor could not prevent it.”

“Hang her foreign tastes; I would to God she had never set foot in that accursed country, or seen that d——d Frenchman; he is somehow mixed up with it, I know. Oh, that I had not been ass enough to let her take Cordelia with her.”



Mrs. Ashley sighed, and murmured "It was no use to enter on that discussion."

"Look at her now; would she have looked like that had we never permitted this marriage. I ought never to have consented to it."

"But—"

"I know what you are going to say, that at the time I was pleased—glad to get her out of mischief. I was afraid of what would become of a girl who had manifested such tastes, and such headstrong will. I thought that love and marriage, and fulfilling a woman's natural duties would put all that nonsense out of her head. I dare swear it has not. Look at her, I say."

Cordelia was sitting on a low camp stool. Her head leaned on her hand, and her hand rested on the arm of Ivy's chair. They were silent, and she was looking down lost in thought. The face lay half in shadow from the hand, and the eyes were veiled by their long eyelashes. In the pose of the figure, in the expression of the features was utter dejection. A painter would have named such a picture "Regret." While Ivy, with her beaming eyes looking upwards at the evening sky, a smile on the whole expression of the joyous face, if not on the lips, might well have personated a living, breathing "Hope."

It was a striking contrast, and both parents were saddened by it.

"She is thinking of her husband," said Mrs. Ashley.

"Husband be —. I tell you she is thinking of how to get her own will after all, spite of father and husband. I have no authority over her, I cannot prevent her, but I swear that if —"

"Dear Ashley," interrupted his wife, "do not grieve yourself by fancies—we are all quiet and peaceful now. I am glad Cordelia is with us; her health would never have borne an Indian climate, though she is of course sad and anxious about him. She must fret, knowing the distance, and the hard service —"

"Tell me, you Mrs. Ashley, in our younger days, had I been obliged to go abroad, who would have prevented your going with me, or my taking you?" Mr. Ashley stopped, and turning faced his wife. The softest blush came into the cheek which time had robbed of its bloom, but not of its delicacy.

"No one."

"Ah! then you own these two do not love as we did." How sweet was that "*we*" to the wife's ears.

"It is so different, my dear."

"I tell you that there is something, or some one between these two; should it be that cursed Frenchman?"

"Impossible — Cordelia married Mr. Clayre, she loved him of course." Mr. Ashley clenched his hand, but dared not avow what he thought.

"Well, I don't say what it is; enough that I see there is something. I am not revengeful, but were it some wrong on Clayre's part, he shall pay for it. If my daughter has been treated ill, the scamp shall not be assisted by my money. I can clip his wings any day. I will sue him to the last penny, or ——"

"He will find a prison is a tighter bond than marriage," said Sarah Ashley, grimly, as she passed them, and joined the two on the lawn.

She had overheard the last sentences.

"How very silent you two are," she said, as she sat down beside them.

"I was enjoying this lovely evening," said Ivy, "and listening to the silence."

"And Cordelia?"

"I was thinking," said Cordelia, looking up.

"I suppose on the same pleasant subject as my father is scolding about just now."

"What?"

"I heard him say, as I passed, 'I will clip his wings, and sue him to the last penny.'"

Ivy did not understand her, but Cordelia did, and her face flushed to the roots of her hair. She rose up as if going to her father.

"Now don't get into a passion," said her sister. Cordelia looked irresolute for a minute, and then sat down again.

"Don't you remember when you were a child that Mrs. Vibert said 'I always know when Cordelia is getting into a passion—she looks red for a minute, then turns quite white, and then it all comes out like a thunder-storm.'"

"Were you so passionate?" said Ivy, smiling.

"We are all passionate in our family," said Sarah, candidly.

"Not Mrs. Ashley, I am sure."

"My mother is an angel," said Cordelia.

"And one cannot expect more than one angel in the house; but I can't waste time here. I have a Bible-class this evening before tea-time, and must be off. Instead of dreaming under trees, I try to do a little good in this life." And Sarah marched off, happy in that her last speech carried double shot. Eulogy on herself was combined with indirect reproach on others.

"To try and do a little good," said Ivy, thoughtfully; "how I have dreamed of that as the strongest motive on earth, but how difficult it is."

"Less so than to be good," said Cordelia, dreamingly.

"Do you know," continued Ivy, gravely,



"though it seemed conceited to say so, I do not find it so."

Cordelia laughed almost merrily.

"Dear Ivy, of course not, there never was such a good little thing."

"No, no, that is not what I mean; it seems to me that I am so placed, that it would require actual wickedness to do wrong. Every one is kind to me. Aunt Anne is indulgent, and Gerard loves me; you are all so good to me, if I were not grateful I should be a wretch" (how prettily Ivy counted up the beads in her rosary of girlish happiness); "but then if I want to make any of you happier, I am so powerless; if I want to be kind to those poorer than I am, I am so useless."

"Never mind, dear, your time for doing good will come, meanwhile I can tell you what a very wise friend of mine used to tell me—if every one who wishes to do good to others would first do all the possible good he could to himself, correct all his own evil, develop all his own good, there would be less wrong to make right."

"Did an Italian say that?"

"No, a friend I knew in Italy," and Cordelia sighed heavily.

"I wish you would tell me something about Italy."

"What can I tell you, where shall I begin?"

"But you love England best." Ivy was the most staunch and loyal of patriots.

"I love best to be an English woman, but I should like, for many reasons, to live in Italy. Physically, the climate suits me; materially, the ease of life pleases me; then its art, its nature, its past, its future, so deeply interest me; and, above all, remember that my happiest and my saddest days have been spent there."

"Mrs. Vibert is buried there?"

"Yes, it holds her grave, and is therefore a Holy Land for me. It seems so far from her here; much as I love others, it was she who sustained, vivified, filled my life for so many years, that the loss to me is unspeakable. But the strange thing is," said Cordelia, in a low voice, "that so powerful is my sense of her vitality, so strong was her possession of me, if I may so term it, that though these eyes saw her in death, she is as living a reality to me as you are. For instance, had I, standing with her in a room, been suddenly struck blind, so that I could not see her, paralysed so that I could not touch her, deaf so that I could not hear her, yet as I had seen, touched, heard her the minute before, I should be certain she was there still; so certain am I now that she is with me always, in death as in life."

"She must have been very good."

"I never think of her as good, or this, or that; enough, as old Montaigne says, 'that she is she, and I am I.'"

"How you must have loved her!"

Cordelia did not say anything, but her look answered Ivy.

The shades were deepening now, and it was almost time to go in. Ivy was only waiting for Mr. Frampton's visit, before being helped into the house and up-stairs. Just as they ceased speaking, he and Miss Ashley appeared together at the little white gate at the end of the carriage-road, and advanced slowly, and in deep conversation to the house.

"If Miss Ashley were to marry," said Ivy, "you would be alone here, Cordelia; you would ask me then very often, would you not?"

"If I were here—yes—but ——"

"You may join Gerard, of course, how stupid of me not to think of it. At any rate, I hope to come back again. This has been 'Italy' to me, dear, dear Cordelia; I love no place so well as this, in which I first knew you."

Poor Ivy! she little knew that even as she spoke, the causes which would create an effectual change of the whole party were at work. The pretty, quiet home, which looked so peaceful and calm, was on the very verge of shipwreck, and

that when she returned to the Ferry all would indeed be changed.

"You seem to have brought the darkness with you," she said to Mr. Frampton and Sarah, as they came towards her to help her in; "it was daylight only a minute ago." Ivy's words were truer than she thought. They did bring the darkness with them.



CHAPTER IX.

FROM some recondite cause, during the first week or two of Ivy's illness, Sarah Ashley was particularly agreeable, and one might almost say good tempered. She was very attentive to Ivy, although the suspicion would arise every now and then that there was some mystery about her—that frank and open as she appeared to them all, there was an under current of reserve and reticence which belonged to her as one of the Clayres. But other influences were at work which softened the exasperation which this idea caused.

Mr. Frampton was a very tall, dark, sleek-looking man, of mediocre intelligence and overweening conceit. It is a great snare for a man of that kind to be a village practitioner.

According to the terrible statistics of country towns and villages, it is wonderful the number of single women who congregate in such neighbourhoods. In active, busy towns, people marry and bring forth children with the same energy that that they do everything else. Persons who have

withdrawn themselves, or have been put on the shelf by the world around them, are drawn to stagnant, dull, small villages, which seem to have been forgotten in the general tumult and hurry of the progress of life in other parts of England. In such spots the clergyman and doctor reign with undisputed sway. If both are single, perhaps the clergyman is the autocrat in chief; but if one is married and the other single, it is the single one who is pre-eminent in the regard of the fairer, weaker sex. Mr. Frampton was in this enviable position, and was the cynosure of Brookferry. His life was a succession of sweetnesses. From the orange marmalade which, made by Miss Nelthorpe's own hands, figured at his breakfast-table, to the red-and-black braided slippers in which his large feet rested after the labours of the day were over, sent him by Miss Pocock, every little attention and care which women are so prone to lavish on men was heaped upon him. Never was a man so coddled. But it must be confessed he deserved it: he was indefatigable in his visits, and impartial, too. There were his professional visits, when he prescribed; his semi-professional visits, when suggestions were made; and his simply friendly ones, where the subject of health was ignored altogether: and thus he entirely monopolised the female society of Brookferry. The daily visit of the

doctor was perchance the solitary gleam of outside life which many of these poor women relied on for the whole day. This spare mental diet, and the excessive homage and fetish worship blended with it, naturally over-balanced a mind not of strong sinews originally; and, as I said before, the position was a snare.

We shall soon have changed all this. Women are now addicting themselves to heretical and abominable investigations, which will no longer permit them to hang with blind faith on the decrees, medical or otherwise, of any man. It is a possibility which we must learn to anticipate with due resignation, that in time the office of village practitioner will be almost a sinecure.

At present, however, in Brookferry, Mr. Frampton lorded it with unmitigated tyranny. He was still youngish; his house was comfortable, though small; his practice represented a certain number of hundreds a year, which the more worldly-minded ladies calculated on. Others thought only of the man, and the potentiality which was his, of bestowing the title of Mrs. on the object of his choice.

Miss Ashley, the daughter of a man who had the reputation of being rich, who lived at the Ferry, and who had only two daughters, was perhaps the lady most favoured at Brookferry by the doctor. To a foolish girl like Ivy there may

have been something plain and ordinary about Sarah's appearance; but in Mr. Frampton's eyes she was a fine woman. She was tall, and what he would have called "personable." This would seem an equivocal epithet; but it meant that she was stout, well furnished with bust, and with a clear though somewhat dark complexion. She would look well at the head of his table, and fill in a comely manner his gig. Of course Mr. Frampton had a gig.

But Mr. Frampton was a cautious man. His house, as I said before, was small, and he rather wished to add a wing to it; but for that he wanted ready money. Would Mr. Ashley pay a sum down with his daughter. Mr. Frampton's resolutions were swayed to and fro by that doubt. And on this additional wing to Mr. Frampton's house, and the £. s. d. necessary to pay for it, hinged the fate of Cordelia. So strange is destiny, so singularly does it link together the most different individuals.

During the previous year a gentleman had been staying at the Rectory, who had paid some attention to Miss Ashley. He was a solicitor, and had come down on business connected with the marriage of Mr. Ashley's youngest daughter. The marriage had taken place abroad, and there were some difficulties connected with settlements.

On his first arrival he had certainly been a

good deal at the Ashleys'; but before he left Brookferry, his visits had in a great measure ceased. After a stay of six weeks, he had returned to London, and nothing more was heard of him.

Village gossip had whispered that Sarah Ashley had been treated ill; that the man had proposed, been accepted, and on some frivolous pretext had broken off the engagement. It was surmised that a want of money had caused the breach.

Mr. Frampton had noticed that Miss Ashley was somewhat cross and snappish to her sister; but the connection between this fact and her disappointment was not apparent to him. In his sublime masculine superiority, he thought he should manage her so well that these ebullitions would not occur with him.

Her youngest sister had married into a good family, and one which would probably sell its name rather dear. It was strange that Mrs. Clayre had not accompanied her husband to India, a bride as she was of only four months' date; but, on the other hand, she had always been delicate, and looked more so than ever. India, on Mr. Frampton's own opinion, had been negatived; and it had given him rather a pleasant sensation of power that his decree had separated husband and wife, and retained Cordelia at the Ferry. It is an agreeable feeling, though one sometimes pays

dearly for it, to play the part of directing Providence, in a family.

Ivy's accident brought Mr. Frampton at first twice, and then once a day, to the Ferry. Mrs. Ashley and Sarah were always present during these visits. With the latter he often conversed in what she would have called "a particular manner."

But still he held back. He was not a fool to rush into an offer, and then retract. He must stand on sure ground.

At first Miss Ashley had simply been pleased at the long visits which Mr. Frampton paid. He had soon finished with Ivy, but he would still remain and talk to her.

When his gig was heard driving up to the house, she would retire for a moment, and return with smoothed hair and brighter cheeks. Beyond this desire, that she should be looking her best when any one came to the house—a duty she owed herself (oh! those agreeable duties we owe ourselves, how pleasant they are to fulfil!)—she did not attach much importance to the delicate manifestations of the doctor's regard.

But as the third week of Ivy's illness still brought the doctor, and still the same lingering could be observed in his visits, Miss Ashley was conscious of the stir of deeper feelings.

In all marriageable and still unmarried females



there is a certain expectancy, a latent hope, which no disappointment can entirely conquer. People are usually very severe and very sarcastic upon the desire of single women to get married. But I think the effect in this case is blamed more than the cause. Of course I am not speaking of those cases where an impatience of celibacy leads a woman to marry a man she dislikes, or of whom she has reason to form a bad opinion. That is a *bonâ fide* sin. But when one considers the negative character of most men and women, the very fairly proportioned good and ill in them, and the positive and decided evils of single life in England, I think the more fortunate individuals who have married their own well-selected choice, should be lenient if some less happy sisters make fierce struggles to escape the lot of celibacy.

Until women have occupations which can fill up their time, or have the good sense to live in associations which in numerical proportion enlarge their resources, I do not think it unreasonable that a middle-aged woman should be anxious to escape the privation, the emptiness, the limitations of a single life, by marrying some middle-aged man, for whom she may not have a violent love, but towards whom she may be anxious to act dutifully and well.

This may sound unromantic, worldly, undig-

nified, but it is the truth. I lament the causes which make so many women unfit for a single life; but allowing those, I cannot be severe upon their effect. It is not true that a woman who is cross and frivolous, single, will be equally so, married. The necessity for additional occupation, the doubled vitality of a married life, employs that activity which otherwise preys on itself. There are instincts in all feminine natures which it is absurd to deny, and they all tend to home, family, conjugal ties. When these are missed, offer all the consolations you like, and there are many, but do not forget that resignation is not choice. There are exceptional women, as there are exceptional men, who are happier unmarried, but an exception marks the rule.

To some it must have appeared strange that Sarah Ashley, with the example of her sister before her eyes, should still aim at marriage. What additional comfort or dignity had it given Cordelia? Here she was, in her father's house, and, but for the change of name, she occupied no different position than she did before. But Cordelia was always a self-willed, imprudent woman. Sarah would not act in that way.

On this evening, when he had walked up with Miss Ashley, Mr. Frampton was asked to stop and have some tea. After tea, they all, except Cordelia and Ivy, adjourned to the garden, and

gradually fell into parties. Mr. Ashley and his wife walked up and down in front of the house. Mr. Frampton and Miss Ashley were seated side by side under the great walnut-tree on the lawn, where Ivy and Cordelia had been during the afternoon. Mr. Frampton was "very particular," but did not, however, commit himself.

"Do you know," said Mrs. Ashley to her husband, "that I think Frampton intends to marry, and that he is rather inclined towards Sarah."

"Sarah!" Mr. Ashley turned quickly round.

"Should not you be glad to see her settled?"

"Certainly. But Frampton is not the man to marry without money."

"But Sarah could have the same allowance she has now."

"Allowance! he wants money down, I tell you. He is always talking of building a new wing to his house. He wants money."

"Then we must prevent him coming here so often; for I think Sarah likes him."

Mr. Ashley made an ambiguous whistle, but did not reply.

"He fancies, perhaps, she will have money. How can one tell him?"

"Tell him, my dear Ashley! what are you thinking of?"

"Tell him, yes; what is the use of making him

a fool, and Sarah too? I hope I am not too late:" and he looked anxiously towards the seat. "Go to them, my dear, say it is cold, and I have gone in."

The move succeeded; and after Mr. Ashley went in, he was soon followed by the others. Sarah looked pleased and bright; but Mr. Frampton did not bear the aspect of a man who has plunged into the irrevocable—he was yet dallying on the shore.

When two men are both honestly anxious, one to find out something, and the other to reveal it, they are sure to succeed in doing so.

Mr. Ashley walked part of the way home with Mr. Frampton that evening.

The next day Mr. Frampton came as usual. Mr. Ashley opened his eyes rather wide: had he been mistaken; was it genuine love?

Two or three evenings afterwards, Mr. Frampton came when they were at tea, and again partook of it. After tea, they again adjourned to the garden, and again the two sat beneath the walnut-tree.

But after a time, Miss Ashley rose, and entering the house, passed through the dining-room, and went up-stairs to her own room.

Mr. Frampton lounged into the dining-room, where Mr. and Mrs. Ashley had now gone in, and sat talking of indifferent subjects with his

usual air of self-satisfied vacuity. He remained for some time ; then rising, and saying he found Ivy so nearly convalescent, that he should not call again for some days, took his leave, without waiting for Miss Ashley's return.

Mr. Ashley felt the most inexpressible longing to kick him, but remained on his seat, and awaited his daughter. But how had Frampton made himself understood ? or had he done so ?

Miss Ashley now came down to perform her usual office of making tea. Her father observed her anxiously. She was flushed, but otherwise looked much as usual.

"What a time you have been, Sarah," said her mother ; "Mr. Frampton had a call to make, and could not wait."

The name of Frampton did not give her a shock ; she merely replied she had found she had forgotten to write a note when she had gone to her room, and had stopped to do so.

But she was very grave, and her father, who was watching her closely, was at no loss to interpret her gravity.

He was very attentive and kind to her ; so much so, that she looked up once or twice in astonishment at him. Though hot-tempered, he was a kind-hearted man, and had always wished to be a kind and indulgent parent to both his daughters. His eldest daughter was, however,

so little loveable, that he had never felt the inclination to pet her as he did Cordelia, even in her childhood ; and latterly her manner had been so defiant and repulsive, that he had as little communication as possible with her.

“ Do you know, old lady ” (Mr. Ashley was in his most benign state when he called his wife “ old lady ”), “ it is a long time since I have been to Wroxton ; shall we three, you, Sarah, and I, go there to-morrow ? Cordelia will take care of Miss Clayre, and we can spend the day there, sleep at the inn, and return in the cool of the morning the next day.”

It was quite a masculine device to propose a little pleasure as consolation for wounded affection.

“ I shall like it,” said Mrs. Ashley. “ Can you come, Sarah ? ”

She hesitated, and looked very keenly at her father for a minute, “ Yes—I can come.”

“ Done, then ; I will go and give the orders.”

When Miss Ashley retired to her own room that evening, she seemed lost in thought. The conversation she had had with Mr. Frampton had been painful, but till this moment there was nothing bitter in it. Mr. Frampton had spoken of his own circumstances as far less prosperous than the world gave him credit ; that the purchase of the business had obliged him to borrow money

at exorbitant interest, and that his profits were so much less than he anticipated, that he was saddled with a heavy arrear of dividends to pay, while those he received were very small, and very slow in coming in. Cut off from marriage as he was by these difficulties, he had made up his mind to sweeten his cup of life with friendship, not with love. He was fortunate in possessing many kind friends in Brookferry, might he include Miss Ashley among them? She, with her intelligence and kindness of heart, would understand and pity him. Miss Ashley was keen enough usually, but so many feelings in her own heart dulled her sharpness at this moment, that she *did* pity him, though understand him she did not.

It was of the greatest importance to Mr. Frampton that there should be no rupture or even coolness between himself and the family at the Ferry; and he had, he imagined, conducted himself like an arch diplomat. What was more, the real womanly heart which lay beneath all Sarah's tempers and obliquities of humour was touched on its right chord. She was for once so sorry for another, that she forgot herself, and had no consciousness that she was hurt or injured, any more than that her dream had been in vain: vain from no individual wrong to herself, but owing to the untoward circumstances of Mr. Frampton's own position.

Could poor Mr. Ashley have been less kind and less remorseful, all would have been well. His kindness seemed to dart a suspicion into her mind. She resolved that the next day she would seize an opportunity, and discover if there were any connection between her father's kindness to her and Mr. Frampton's confession.

CHAPTER X.

A LONG day alone with Cordelia! That was Ivy's waking thought, as she heard the wheels of the little four-wheeled chaise bear away Mr. and Mrs. Ashley and Sarah.

She hastened to dress, and limped into the drawing-room, and sate on her usual couch. Her ankle was better, but not strong enough to permit her to walk.

Cordelia soon afterwards came in.

"What a pleasant day we shall have, Ivy," she said, smiling. "What shall I do to amuse you?"

"I do not know what to ask you first. I want you to sing to me; I want you to describe me some of the places you have seen abroad; I want you to tell me all about yourself."

Cordelia laughed. "Which shall I do first, or can I contrive to do all three at once?"

Ivy clapped her hands. She had so rarely heard Cordelia laugh before. It was a glad, sweet laugh, and promised a keener capacity for enjoyment than one could expect from the usual sadness of the face.

Cordelia had thrown herself in a large chair by the side of Ivy's couch. Her simple white morning-dress, fastened at the throat with a small Etruscan-shaped gold brooch, suited well her pure delicate beauty. The masses of wavy hair fell low on the neck, gathered loosely in a net, and showed the outline of the fine head.

The only thing Ivy did not admire in Cordelia was her mysteriousness ; so she answered, "Tell me first about yourself."

"Dear Ivy, I have reasons which must make me for a long time, perhaps for ever, somewhat reserved with you ; but I so dislike the idea of your thinking me a female Bluebeard, with a cupboard full of horrors, that there are some things I *will* tell you."

"I shall be so glad."

"Yes, I think if I claimed it, you would trust me, dear child ; I have faith in you which tells me you have faith in me ; in all things which concern only me, I do not see any harm in telling you precisely the circumstances in which I have been placed, and I know that this dear, frank, honest heart, will be better pleased." She stooped, and her fresh rosy lips kissed Ivy's forehead.

She certainly did not look a creature to whom mysteries should belong. There was truth in her glance, in her smile, above all in her voice.

A voice always betrays. To a quick ear the tones of a voice are unmistakeable. No person who is deceitful, who talks for effect, who is acting a part, should forget this. He or she will be detected by all those who have studied the gamut of that most subtle of instruments the human voice.

“Sarah is eight years older than I am,” she began, “and my mother, having lost two boys after Sarah’s birth, was particularly drawn to me by her fear of losing me, for I was like them, and not strong and stout like Sarah. Both she and my father were so afraid that I should die too, that the care they bestowed on me was something quite extraordinary. If I looked pale, change of air was thought necessary, and I was sent to the seaside with one or the other of them; but it generally happened that it was my father on whom the task devolved. I was thrown so much with him, that he made quite a pet of me. I am sorry I saw so little of Sarah. I was little at home, and when I was here I was so spoiled, she thought, by every one, that she considered it right to be an exception, and to treat me with severity. The consequence was that at that time I disliked her. When I was eight years old, I was still so delicate that my father gladly accepted my godmother’s (Mrs. Vibert’s) invitation for me to spend a winter at Ventnor with her. She was a very rich young widow, without children, and

had taken a fancy to me. I was so much better when I returned, that my father's gratitude knew no bounds. From that time till I was sixteen I spent nearly every winter with Mrs. Vibert. At that time she went abroad, and she asked my father if he would allow me to go with her. She was to be away three years. He hesitated. Out of England! He had the strongest prejudices to everything foreign. He hated foreigners, as has always been the duty of every free-born Briton to do; but that hatred, which with many is a broad general hatred of all foreign nations, as wearing wooden shoes and eating frogs, is concentrated with him into abhorrence of France. He is too positive a person to hate *en masse*; he must have some individual scapegoat on whom to pour out his vials of wrath, and the man he hates most is a Frenchman. My dear father's prejudices on this point have been of great injury to me. But it is not on that account I regret it. I regret it as I regret everything which seems like a fault in one I so dearly love and so truly respect. Had it been Mrs. Vibert's intention to remain in France, he would have refused at once; but she was to winter in Italy, at Pisa, or Rome, or Naples, and she urged my health as one reason for her request. She also said that I had gifts which required a higher cultivation than I could find at the Ferry. That she would watch over me as

her own child ; that if I was anxious at any time to return, I should have the opportunity of doing so. That she or I would write once a week, so that every particular of my life, studies, health, should be known at home.

"I was naturally anxious to go. I was very fond of my parents, but I loved Mrs. Vibert too, and I had an eager desire to go to Italy. My father consented at last.

"Every advantage that the best masters in music, singing, painting, could give me, I had. I suppose it was impossible to lead a happier, more healthy life than I did. Mrs. Vibert was handsome, though not young. She had a masculine independence of mind, united to the softest manners. Thrown early in life on her own resources, from the independence which her position as a wealthy widow gave her, she had acquired a firmness, a decision, which, I have heard, was displeasing to those men who transacted business with her. Men do not readily forgive a woman for understanding so well as she did all the arcana of money affairs. It is a fundamental article in their creed that women do not understand business, and are incapable of managing property. To all others Mrs. Vibert was fascination itself. To me she was, she will ever be, my dearest friend. In my eyes she was perfect. Next in my affection to her, was her most inti-

mate friend, M. Corsand. I must describe him to you, Ivy. He had known Mrs. Vibert from her girlhood. When at school in Paris, she used to spend her holidays with his mother. The Corsands were poor, but their family is one of the oldest in France. The name was originally Cœur Saint, from a legend of an ancestor who had left directions, that after his death his heart, should be buried in the Holy Land. The widow herself took it to Jerusalem, and on her way she stopped a few days in Rome, and the Pope blessed it himself. Since which, the family have always borne that name, though it gradually became corrupted into Corsand, but the device is still Cœur Saint. After my own family, there is no one now I love so well. Don't look so blank, dear, I consider you one of my own family."

There was a pause. Ivy thought of Gerard. Cordelia seemed trying to recall a face to her mind. She went on.

"M. Corsand was a few years younger than Mrs. Vibert. He is not handsome, but the vitality in his glance, the vigour and energy of all his movements, are more striking than beauty. No one can have looked into that face, without acknowledging it gives the impression of great mental power. To me, and to others who know him well, it also expresses moral goodness. Not a goodness carried on the sleeve as a badge which

all can distinguish, for his quiet manners conceal it ; but wherever in his own sphere there is a good action done, wherever some sorrow is mitigated, some evil wiped out, you can trace M. Corsand. His opinions are, however, of the broadest and freest kind. They now are more popular than when he first promulgated them, but the prejudice which his early propounding them caused, still clings to him in many circles. If I have anything true and brave in my heart, I owe it to Mrs. Vibert and to him."

Cordelia's eyes filled with tears. Ivy felt a pang of strange jealousy through her heart. Did Gerard know this Corsand ?

"He was always with us. He had an apartment in the same house. Though I was so young, a mere girl, he talked a good deal to me. He encouraged my taste, and roused my ambition. I whispered to him my desire to develope the talent which I dreamed I possessed. I despised all amateurship. I wanted to be an artist. In spite of all the anger which I knew would be roused by such a wish, I desired to go on the stage. He neither ridiculed nor scolded me ; he did not think me mad or wicked, but he probed me as to the reality of my vocation. In all girls' lives there is a time when they are apt to mistake enthusiasm for faculty. When the budding life which swells in their own being gives a warmth

and glow to their hearts, to their minds, to their tastes. When life seems as full of visionary power as of ideal happiness. When we stand on a height where the voice of youthful ambition speaks as the voice of the tempter, and showing us the towers and palaces of human achievement, promises us they may be ours. But all this is illusory and short lived. M. Corsand told me, after he had studied me for awhile, that he saw this was not my case. It was not to exhibit my person, or display my voice, that I sought the stage as a profession, but to express that which was true and beautiful, to the best of my ability. It was an utterance to me as painting is to the painter, sculpture to the sculptor, music to the musician. They employ canvas, and clay, and the dotted page, to reveal the spiritual part of themselves. My voice and my person were the vehicles which I used for the same purpose. I drew my materials from theirs, and manifested in song and gesture what they had sought to portray. He encouraged me, so did Mrs. Vibert. I had no ulterior considerations at that time, but I cultivated my voice, and trained myself to what eventually I hoped would be my profession. How well it was for me to live as I did then, to develop in the most genial atmosphere that could have been found for an aspirant in art. In Italy, and with two such singularly judicious friends!



M. Corsand was deeply interested in political events, and watched narrowly the course of Italian affairs. I became so also. I wrote frankly home, especially to my father, and most of my letters, at the time I speak of, were full of M. Corsand. It never occurred to me to mention how much he was my senior. I never felt he was so, save in the delightful deference to his opinion, and of faith in his wisdom, which I possessed. But in his warmth of heart, his energetic, active temperament, he was, and will ever be, young. I was so fully occupied and interested every way, that the usual interests and aims of girlhood were ignored by me. I never dreamed of loving or being loved in any other way but that which was manifested towards me, and which I experienced myself. I loved M. Corsand with precisely the same kind of affection that I felt for Mrs. Vibert; but it had a more intellectual portion in it. He was more particularly the friend of my mind.

"When I was twenty I wrote to my father my desire of becoming a singer. I was full of the spirit of independence. I had a gift which gave me the means of making money. Why should I not do so?

"You may imagine the angry astonishment which this letter caused. I wrote, no doubt, with the crudeness and aggressiveness with which all

people propound their first convictions, and assert their own theories; and at the Ferry, at Brook-ferry, where girls were kept in leading-strings all their lives till they married—when they were provided for, and given a few pounds besides for pin-money; where till then they never had the power of even buying a piece of furniture for themselves—rank heresy would have seemed less flagrant a violation of right.

“My father comes from a Presbyterian family, and his disapproval of the stage amounts to abhorrence. That such heterodox views should be entertained at all, was sad enough; but that they should become feasible, through his daughter’s entering that accursed profession, was more than he could bear.

“He sat down and wrote me a fulminating letter. He was not content with that: he coupled this taste of mine with the burden which ran through my letters of the goodness, the genius of Maurice Corsand. Maurice Corsand, the Frenchman! With the strong indignation which this impression gave him, and assuming that his undue influence over me could only have been through love, he wrote words which I cannot think of, even after this lapse of time, without pain and terror. The insults heaped upon the name of Corsand, were more than I can tell you. His violence amounted to frenzy.



"He called him a needy adventurer, who would seek to utilise my talents, or to obtain possession of Mrs. Vibert's wealth, by any arts which could blind two vain, weak women. Had he been personally jealous of M. Corsand, or had Mrs. Vibert in some way been false and treacherous to him, he could not have been more bitter or more vindictive. He commanded me to return home immediately. His letter to Mrs. Vibert I never saw; but I believe it was far worse than even mine.

"I have only spoken to you of my friendship for M. Corsand. I cannot, as I am bound to secrecy, speak of him in connection with Mrs. Vibert. That secret will die with me. I have kept it hitherto to my own loss, and no power shall tempt me to divulge it. Mrs. Vibert, M. Corsand, and I, are the only persons who know it. It is enough to say she honoured no one as she did him, always."

Cordelia's voice faltered as she thus spoke. She went on in a calmer tone.

"She was particularly grateful to him for his kindness to me. We were all so happy when that letter came. My father is really so good, that I am sure he would not have sent it, could he have calculated the pain it caused.

"We were all sitting on a terrace looking out on the sea, at Sorrento, when the letters came in.

I wept bitterly over mine. Mrs. Vibert read hers, and turned as pale as a sheet. M. Corsand begged to see it. She would not permit it for a long time ; but at last yielded. When he had done reading it, he looked very thoughtful for awhile, but was silent. His eye then fell on me. I was sobbing. He turned to me, and did his best to console me. He has such wonderful self-control that, on looking at his face, I should never have thought he had been insulted, as, alas ! I afterwards knew he had been.

“After some time spent in soothing me, he went to Mrs. Vibert, and they left the terrace together. When they returned, I saw Mrs. Vibert had been crying. Her eyelids and cheeks were red. He was as calm as before.

“The question then arose about my return. This renewed my grief. To return to England when my father was so angry, when he would always be on the watch to see if I meditated rebellion, or was seeking independence, would be impossible. I implored Mrs. Vibert to let me remain for awhile with her. I told her I would write to my father and tell him I would obey his wishes as to the stage, and entreat his permission to remain, at least till Mrs. Vibert’s return to England.

“I despatched the letter, but I was still miserable. Though innocent myself, I felt I had been

the means of giving pain to Mrs. Vibert and M. Corsand. I was almost ashamed to look at them. His kindness never failed. She had been more wounded, and though she tried to be the same, I saw how hurt and indignant she was. She never answered my father's letter, and no communication ever again passed between them till she wrote to him on her death-bed. She had at one time settled a very considerable sum of money on me, but she had now, I learnt, altered her will; bequests to individuals were all cancelled, and the whole of her fortune was to be disposed of in charities, under M. Corsand's trusteeship and superintendence.

"My father answered my letter, and consented that I should stay till Mrs. Vibert's return. He was very ungracious, and said he could not help himself. He could not fetch me himself, owing to business; and he did not like the idea of my travelling alone, even with a confidential servant for escort.

"It was soon after this time, and at Naples, that I married your brother." (Cordelia never, if possible, named Gerard.) "But this is too immediately personal to both you and me to enter upon now. Mrs. Vibert made all the preparations for my marriage, and I married from her house; but, three months afterwards, I was telegraphed for from the place where we had gone, and

I was able, thank God, to be with her for the last few days. She was sorry then, she told me, that she had revoked the legacy in my favour; but it was too late. She had sent to England for the draught of a new will to be drawn up by her lawyers, but she did not live to receive it. On her death-bed she wrote to my father and told him this. Six weeks afterwards I came to England."

Cordelia's voice dropped suddenly.

"And have you never seen M. Corsand since?"

"Never. A week after Mrs. Vibert's death he was summoned to Paris to attend his mother's death-bed."

"And that letter!" said Ivy, blushing at her own curiosity, "that letter the Italian boy brought?"

"No, dearest, that letter was not from him. It was from a woman—a Russian."

"A friend of yours?"

"God forbid!"

Ivy was startled at the agitation with which Cordelia replied, but she had commanded herself again, and waited for Ivy to speak.

"Does Gerard know her?"

"Yes."

Her voice was so low, that it was rather by the motion of her lips than from her voice that Ivy heard her.

"Do not let us speak of her," she resumed, after a pause. "I dare say I shall give you a wrong impression of her. She once did me a great kindness, as she thought; it was not her fault that it has caused me a life-long sorrow. And I am like a baby. I feel vindictive against the instrument which hurt me, when it was my own fault that it did so. Now, Ivy dear, you know and can judge me a little. What fiat do you pronounce?"

Ivy blushed.

"Speak out, dear."

"Don't think me impertinent, dearest Cordelia, but will you let me ask one thing?"

"Has your brother requested you to ask me anything?"

Cordelia's voice was stern and altered.

"No—no; he has never said a word to me."

"What then?"

"Does Gerard know of the secret between you, Mrs. Vibert, and M. Corsand?"

"No; not a human being but we three—and now, alas! we two—have any idea of it."

"Is it right to have secrets kept from your husband?"

"It is not my secret, Ivy."

"But——"

"Never mind any buts; it could not be helped." She sighed heavily, and an expression

of pain and fear passed over her face, such as one can read in the lovely eyes of a deer when it hears the distant bark of a dog. "Do not let us speak of that any more, Ivy; it makes me superstitious talking of all these sad things—as if something dreadful was going to happen."

Ivy hastened to change the conversation.

"Did you ever meet a lady at Naples a great friend of Sir Arthur's—a Princess Bifrons?"

Cordelia stared at Ivy, and her face flushed crimson as she replied: "Yes." After a pause, she said, in a voice which trembled in spite of herself: "Why do you ask?"

It was Ivy's turn to blush, and she said hastily: "Gerard used to write about her."

Cordelia drew her chair back, and Ivy could not see her face as she asked again—

"What! I mean was she greatly admired by him?"

"He admired her very much," said Ivy, awkwardly enough, for she remembered that the letters in which he mentioned the Princess were those written in the flush of his first raptures over Cordelia.

"Say it again, Ivy; let me hear it from *your* lips."

Ivy turned towards her in surprise.

"He used to write about her as if he admired her very much. She is very handsome, is she not?"

“Yes.”

The word dropped from her lips as if it were poison.

At this moment the sound of carriage wheels announced the return of the absent ones.

Mr. and Mrs. Ashley entered in a moment or two. Mr. Ashley looked red and angry. Mrs. Ashley seemed very sad and anxious. After they had settled themselves, Cordelia asked where her sister was.

Mr. Ashley suppressed something like an oath.

“She has gone to her own room,” said Mrs. Ashley, sadly. “She has been rather put out, I think.”

Cordelia’s eyes sought those of her father, but he somewhat pertinaciously held them fixed on his newspaper.

When Ivy was in bed that evening she thought long and seriously of what Cordelia had said.

“It does seem hard,” she thought, “that Cordelia, who is so gifted—such a genius, I should say—and who could in a few months, I am sure, realise money enough to take her to India to join Gerard, and to do whatever she thought best, should be prevented doing this by the prejudices of others. Aunt Anne is the same, too. Why do people hate their daughters going on the stage? Is it not possible to remain uncontaminated there? Nothing—nothing could

make me believe that any wrong could befall Cordelia. She looks so pure, so noble, so firm. Is obedience a duty even when parents are wrong? And, then, what a pity she has so many secrets."

This thought led to such subtle chains of argument, that she dropt asleep before she had answered it to her satisfaction.

CHAPTER XI.

MISS ASHLEY had resolved on the morning they left the Ferry to satisfy herself that a suspicion which had darted into her mind on observing the unwonted gentleness of her father was correct.

Miss Ashley was one of those persons who, if forced to action, can, as a general rule, act well. Had it been put to her, "Shall this money be paid for Gerard Clayre? it will enable him to enter a career in which he may achieve an independence for himself and Cordelia, instead of rotting in a prison;" she would not have refused it. But she would, nevertheless, have lost no opportunity of scolding about it. She would have taunted Cordelia whenever the latter provoked her, and would have been sorry afterwards. She was not only passionate but bitter. Like most women who talk much, she added to her own rage by the velocity and copiousness of her words. The very rapidity with which the wheel revolved struck fire from it.

Philosophers tell us that the ties of blood are

a delusion. I cannot agree with this. Paradoxical as it may seem to say so, the fact is proved by the additional intensity with which members of the same family hate each other, just as much as the peculiarly deep love with which they love. In all family disputes, too, it is extraordinary how all the courtesies of life are set aside. When a man quarrels with another who is not a relative, he can be guarded and discreet in his language, but with a brother or sister, he borrows his expressions from Billingsgate, and his accusations from the Old Bailey.

Cordelia had intelligence enough not to expect that in this remote town of England she should find life as varied, as full of colour and interest, as that which she had been leading for six years. Nor did she suppose that she would meet with the companionship and sympathy to which she had been accustomed. Yet the tone which her sister took on their meeting wounded and repulsed as much as it surprised her.

Miss Ashley had said to herself, "Cordelia shall not think I am going to be dazzled by her fine accomplishments and fashionable manners. I do not see what good they have done her. She has married a beggar, and she has reason, I suspect, to regret her choice in more ways than one. If she makes a friend of me, and confides in me, I will remember we are sisters; if not, I shall



look after my own place in the family, and take care that my father does not give up everything to her." On this principle she had met her sister.

Miss Ashley would have been surprised if a keen observer had shown her, after a month, the real state of the case. The defiant, vexatious manner remained, but the heart had been touched and the vanity flattered. She had yearnings, carefully repressed however, to caress, to pity, to console her beautiful sister; but the wrong path had been entered upon, and could not be abandoned. Cordelia had shrunk into herself, and every impatient, rude speech of her sister, though never replied to or resented by her, established a barrier between them. She was too much absorbed in her own cares and anxieties to detect that it might be called "love turned inside out" which was the source of so much that pained her. It all was part of a state of things which made her suffer terribly, and she was resolved to escape from it as soon as she could.

How often do these domestic dramas go on in families! What bitter feuds, what oppressive tyranny, what dogged resistance in those comfortable English homes!

The exodus of the lawyer who sought her in marriage had not pained Miss Ashley's heart, but it had mortified her pride. It is not agreeable

to be sought merely as a money-bag, but it is equally disagreeable to be rejected for the want of it. Besides, it brought a whole train of reflections. Would this unjust generosity of her father permanently affect her own position? In giving this price for one daughter's rash marriage, had he condemned the other to celibacy? The course of her meditations had not lessened the bitterness of her feelings towards her sister or her resentment against her father.

On Ivy's arrival she had been in the exasperated state consequent on this, and it was not till Mr. Frampton's diurnal visits that she was softened.

Hope now again dawned in her breast. Mr. Frampton was not a needy man, and did not appear an interested one. Her feelings were more engaged here. She had long known him, and shared in the emulation which all maiden Brookferry felt, to obtain a place in his affections. The dream was fleeting as 'twas fair, but still there was no blot on the disinterestedness of Mr. Frampton. He was not going to marry, because he felt too poor to do so. Miss Ashley's want of fortune had nothing to do with it. How honourable of him to have expressed himself as he did.

This was the first impression. There was regret, but nothing else. Mr. Ashley's unwonted

gentleness and consideration roused another train of ideas.

Mr. Ashley had been a kind, indulgent father to both his girls when children, but even then had made a great and perceptible difference towards Cordelia. As they grew up, in the manner of many men, he was less kind and indulgent. Babies and children are indulged by parents because their little ways, their infant wills, do not thwart or come into direct contact with older peculiarities and more stubborn determination. They are on a different level. But as they approach the same standing-point that we do, there is more opposition and less patience. With persons of the old school there is a rooted principle that the young should be kept down. They are snubbed to keep them in their place. Mr. Ashley was one of these. Had Cordelia been at home from sixteen to twenty-four she would have felt this as much as her sister: as it was, she had left when her growing intelligence would have brought her into no harmonious intercourse with her father. She was saved all the slow grinding of the domestic sceptre which had been felt by Sarah.

When she returned she was married; that bare fact has a charm upon the dictatorial propensities of men like Mr. Ashley, and it was no use denying it, he was proud of her. He had

always felt a compunction for the hasty letter he had written Mrs. Vibert; "But then who would have thought she was going to take the part of that d——d Frenchman!"

When it was done, however, he was a little ashamed of himself; and when he received Mrs. Vibert's last letter he was melted at once. She adjured him by their long friendship to make up to Cordelia the injustice that she had done her in omitting her from her will. She told him that his own angry letter had been the cause of it, and that she had repented her own hastiness too late. She spoke of her love for Cordelia in a way that brought the tears to his eyes, and he had resolved to obey her wishes.

When Gerard Clayre came to town, and the nefarious transaction came to light which involved him in a debt of eight thousand pounds, Mr. Ashley came forward at once. He paid Cordelia's portion, and took the three thousand from Sarah's to make up the sum required. This three thousand was, however, a loan only.

It was unjust to Sarah. His only way of salving over his conduct was, that he would in time save up the three thousand pounds necessary to complete her fortune, and if she married before that was done, she should have, at any rate, the interest of the five thousand. This, he thought, made everything square, and, consequently, he



was very indignant at some of Sarah's innuendoes. As time wore on, the prestige of Cordelia's position, so singularly truncated of its chief value, the presence of the husband, faded from his mind. The sacrifices he had made for Gerard were present to him, and there was a sense they were not appreciated as they deserved. When his attention was drawn to Mr. Frampton, it again pressed on him that he had wronged his eldest daughter. Five thousand pounds was the least portion that a man like Mr. Frampton would insist on.

His surmise was found true, for in that walk home with Mr. Frampton he had, as he imagined most artfully, but in truth most transparently, laid the real state of things before him. He spoke of marriage in general terms, and from marriage he reverted to household expenses, and had brought out the fact that his daughter's portion was a very small one. He was very grieved at the effect he had produced. In responding to the frankness of his companion, Mr. Frampton had mentioned incidentally that many of his friends had been anxious that he should marry a lady whose name he would not mention, but who had ten thousand pounds of her own, and had expectations to the amount of ten more. He was loud in declaring that nothing should ever induce him to marry for money. But

he said his position demanded of him that his wife *should* possess some portion. Five thousand pounds now, and the prospective anticipation of five more, was the sum at which he hinted his expectations.

Mr. Ashley was grieved, but it was too late. He returned home sad at heart. The next day the blow had told, and he was full of commiseration for Sarah.

He had proposed this little excursion as a diversion to her, and thought if it could be prolonged, by their spending a few days at Wroxton, it would serve to keep her out of the way till the first natural disappointment was over.

There is a French proverb which speaks of "des finesses cousues avec du fil blanc," and quite as manifest were Mr. Ashley's plans to his lynx-eyed daughter.

They arrived early, after a pleasant morning drive, which was enough to have sweetened the sourest temper, and in two hours reached Wroxton. They breakfasted, and walked about the town. Mrs. Ashley and Sarah rejoiced their hearts with a little feminine shopping, and Mr. Ashley went to see some friends.

As usual, they dined in the middle of the day, and, instead of remaining in the sitting-room after dinner, adjourned to the bedrooms assigned to them.

These were two comfortable rooms, with Italian windows opening upon a balcony which ran round the house, and into which all the bedrooms on that floor opened.

The bedroom of an English country inn is a memory almost of the past; so rapidly do we travel, that to sleep at an inn during any stage of our journey is almost obsolete. When London or any great terminus is reached, then the tired and homeless traveller may seek a rest at the railway hotel; but these buildings have quite a different physiognomy.

This inn at Wroxton was an old-fashioned one. There were the immemorial green Venetian blinds pulled down, to keep out the sun, for fear of fading the carpet; there was the painted wash-hand stand, with its coarse, but clean, towels; the narrow beds and chintz curtains, and the roomy chest of drawers. Everything was neat and clean, but cheerless. We laugh at the marble-topped tables, the large mirrors, and vases of artificial flowers, in foreign bedrooms, but they certainly give a gayer aspect to the place. The light iron tripods on which the apparatus of washing is disposed, may seem to treat the subject with undue levity, but then they have the advantage of a less *prononcé* appearance, should we be forced to admit strangers, or to sit ourselves in our bedrooms.

Mr. Ashley threw off his coat, and took his after-dinner nap in one of these rooms, while his wife, who was somewhat tired, lay down on the sofa.

Sarah would not draw up the blinds, as the light might have disturbed them, but sat by the window reflecting on the past.

While she thus sat she heard the blinds of the next room drawn up quickly, and then she heard two chairs placed on the balcony, and presently the odorous whiff of cigars was borne into the room.

"We shall soon have to congratulate you, I suppose," said a voice unknown to her.

"It is a clear case, I think," said another; and this time her heart beat, for it was the voice of Mr. Frampton.

"You are a deuced lucky fellow, I tell you—but did I not hear you were flirting with a lady at Brookferry?"

"I flirt with all the ladies at Brookferry," answered Mr. Frampton, in a mildly jocose manner.

"Nay, but I surely heard that you were paying attentions—particular attentions—to Miss Ashley."

"Pshaw! I went there, for there is a friend of theirs with them who sprained her ankle very badly—a fine girl, I tell you, with eyes

that look straight through you, and as sharp as a needle."

"But Miss Ashley?" persisted the other interlocutor.

"Confound you; Miss Ashley was very civil, and I was very civil, and she has good points about her; but the old man very properly told me something which altered my mind. He has not, however, acted fairly to his eldest daughter."

"What was it?"

"Oh, I shan't betray confidences; but though I am rich enough to indulge a fancy if I had one, it would never enter my head to marry without money."

"You have not lost by waiting," returned the other.

"I have not made up my mind, I can tell you. Sometimes, when people are up to the mark as to money, there are other drawbacks; besides, *she* might not like Brookferry."

"Poor Miss Ashley!" said his friend.

"Miss Ashley does not need your sympathy. I have a great respect for her, and I have known them all for years. If you have done your cigar, we may as well call for the bill, and go. We shall scarcely have time to get back."

"When do you return here?"

"Next week."

Sarah heard them replace their chairs, and then the door of the room slammed, and their receding steps were heard down the passage.

CHAPTER XII.

IT requires no dramatic arrangement of circumstances to bring about a catastrophe. The simple accident of Mr. Ashley having put up at the same inn as Mr. Frampton, was the cause of incalculable misery to the Ashley family.

Miss Ashley was dumb with indignation for a minute or too. Unfortunately Mr. Ashley had been awoke by the slamming of the door, and started off his chair.

"Good heavens! what is the matter," he said; "I never heard such a noise," and he walked up to the window near which stood his daughter.

"The person who made that noise is Mr. Frampton, who has just left the next room." She spoke in a hard, almost insolent voice.

"Mr. Frampton—the deuce it is," and Mr. Ashley gave a prolonged yawn.

"I have heard Mr. Frampton speaking to his friend all this time. I have heard—" and her indignation could be repressed no longer—"what makes me thank you, father."

"Sarah!"

"Yes; from my childhood you have been unjust to me, and now you have shown your partiality in a wise manner. I might have been happy," a spasm passed over her face, "but for you." Sarah Ashley was literally trembling with rage. All reserve, all modesty, had left her. She was stung to madness by what she had heard.

"You are crazy," said her father, "to talk so to me."

"Yes; crazy because I speak the truth. You have no right to sacrifice me to Cordelia. Why should she be considered always? has she been a better, more obedient daughter than I have? What have I done, that you should hate me?"

"Hate you? you're a fool to stand provoking me there."

"I don't care for your anger. I *will* be heard. It has been a shameful wrong, *he* said so," and she pointed to the next room.

"He's a scoundrel."

"And for what have I been sacrificed—for the sake of Cordelia, who has married into a family who despise and reject her?" This was the sore point with Mr. Ashley, and she knew it.

"Hold your tongue."

She went on unheeding him — "Even her husband, how does he treat her? his fine pauper relations, have they ever written a word to her?"

does he ever write ? and bought at that price ! ” She laughed scornfully.

“ Hold your tongue, I tell you.” Mr. Ashley’s eyes flashed with rage.

“ I am old enough to speak ; I am not a baby to bear all in silence. A father has no right to act so.”

“ No right to do what he likes ? ”

“ Not to be so unjust to one of his children for the sake of the other.”

“ Hush, Sarah,” said Mrs. Ashley, who had come in from the next room, and with her gentle voice tried to allay the storm.

“ Every one is against me,” persisted Sarah, who had worked herself into a flood of tears. “ I *will* not bear it.”

“ You shall learn to bear it, or — ” Mr. Ashley’s arm was raised for a blow.

“ For God’s sake, Ashley,” said the poor wife, as she stood between them. “ Sarah, leave the room, I beg of you.”

Sarah’s rage had culminated to the highest verge by this time ; her father’s intention had given a revulsion of fear and shocked resentment to her towering passion, and she fell on a chair in a fit of strong hysterics.

Mr. Ashley was a little alarmed. His passion was always short-lived. Sarah’s words had offended him deeply, but his own conscience

stung him, and told him there was some truth in the accusations she had hurled at him.

He left the room, while his wife remained to soothe her daughter. He only stopped to say, that as soon as possible the chaise should be got ready, and they should return.

Mrs. Ashley was one of those extremely quiet women whose existence is a fact without being felt as a reality, except in days of illness or in times of sorrow. Though the mother of a daughter of thirty, she was as shy in many respects as a young girl. A thousand useful offices were filled up by her in the house which were never traced, especially to her. It was only when she was absent that these subtle charities and ministrings were missed, and the effect, established the cause. She was fond of, and indulgent to, her daughters, but her whole heart was wrapped up in her husband. The whole force of her character had been absorbed in this feeling; but it was a mute one, and it was not guessed at by its object. Mr. Ashley was of a coarser, more ordinary nature. He felt he had a good wife, but that the pearl of great price, a thoroughly devoted and unselfish affection, was his, he was as unconscious of as a savage is of the intrinsic worth of the jewels in his belt. A bit of glass would be the same to him.

She had been sorry for Sarah, but she blamed

her, and when Miss Ashley was more composed, spoke kindly but firmly to her. She was usually very silent, and her words had a greater effect on her daughter in consequence. She insisted on her making an apology to her father when he returned. Nothing could excuse such defiance of parental authority, and she urged Sarah to humble herself with a resolute earnestness so unlike her usual softness, that it conquered her. She hinted to Sarah that eventually the injustice to her would be rectified. She told her that it was in obedience to a dying wish of Mrs. Vibert's (towards whom the whole family were under great obligations, as Sarah knew) that Mr. Ashley had come forward so liberally to the aid of Gerard Clayre.

When Mr. Ashley returned, the tempest had calmed. Sarah expressed herself properly, and her father accepted her apology.

But the drive home was silent. After such a violent disruption they could not swing back again into the places they were in before.

Miss Ashley still felt wronged. Mr. Ashley could not help showing a certain alteration of manner.

Cordelia saw that some scene had taken place. Her father was abrupt and cross to her, and avoided looking at her. He only unbent whilst talking to Ivy. Ivy was a great favourite. She

was a brave girl, he said, she had borne pain with fortitude, and confinement to the house with patience. She was so merry too. Elderly men are very fond of basking in the sunshine of a glad young heart. All kinds of meritorious qualities in older women are passed by, but the gay laugh of sixteen is priceless to them. It brings back a faint glittering from their own golden age, and is listened to with something of the ecstasy that Wordsworth's Susan listened to the bird in Holborn.

Sarah did not come down. She was tired, and preferred having her tea upstairs.

Cordelia took it up. Miss Ashley's eyes flashed, but she merely said, "Pray do not give yourself so much trouble, the servant could have brought it."

"But I wished to see how you were. Tell me, what is the matter?" asked Cordelia, gently.

"Nothing, thank you; I am tired, and shall go to bed directly."

She looked very tired. Cordelia left her. There was a weight at her heart. She had an intuition that she was somehow connected with Sarah's suffering, whatever it might be, and her father's unusual curtness to her confirmed her in this idea. When they all retired to their rooms, she was resolved to discover what had

occurred. There was a suppressed irritability about her father's manner which prevented her addressing herself to him, but she thought she would go to her mother.

Much as Cordelia loved her mother, she had always felt hitherto that she was more in her father's confidence. Intercourse with him was so much easier. Mrs. Ashley's stillness and silence had drawn a charmed circle around her that no one thought of invading, except in moments of extremity.

Cordelia put on her dressing-gown, and lightly knocked at the door of her mother's room.

Mrs. Ashley was undressed, but sat by her table reading.

She was not like either of her daughters in features, but her complexion was like Cordelia's. Paler, but as transparently delicate. Her light hair, of that tint which so rarely becomes grey, even in advanced life, was put back under her cap. The character of the entire face was repose. One must have looked deeply to have detected that the lips were a little less calmly set than usual, or the eyes somewhat dim.

She looked up. "You, Cordelia; what do you want, my dear?"

Cordelia entered, kissed her, and then drew a chair beside her. "Tell me, dear mother, what has happened. I know something is the matter: my

father looks so strange, and Sarah has been crying terribly, I see ? ”

“ Poor Sarah has been much vexed, and has been very angry — ”

“ But what have I to do with it ? for I feel that somehow I have, though how I cannot tell.”

“ No one can blame you, dear.”

“ I beseech you, tell me : I have a great many faults, I know ; but indifferent to the feelings of my father and sister I cannot be.”

“ My dear Cordelia, you are blameless.”

“ Yes ; but Sarah does not think so.”

“ Sarah is very hasty, and has no self-control.”

“ But what made her angry ? ”

Mrs. Ashley reflected. She was very averse to give pain, and she considered that nothing could alter the fact. Why should Cordelia be vexed also ? Yet how far better it would have been to have heard the truth from her lips.

“ My dear child, it is no use worrying you. Sarah will be all right to-morrow, I am sure. She has been vexed, and spoke very disrespectfully to your father, but she has apologised, and the whole thing will blow over. Do not sit up and worry yourself.”

Mrs. Ashley stooped and kissed her daughter, and stroked her hair as when she was a child, and

Cordelia felt that it was hopeless. She rose, took leave of her mother, and retired to her own room.

She sate there for a long while. The uneasy motion with which one hand clasped the other, turning round and round the wedding-ring on the slender finger, was a proof how troubled and anxious were her thoughts.

She felt herself doubly fettered. Duty to her parents on the one hand, and the regard due to that symbol (how mocking a one in her case!) on the other. Then there was the money, and what Sarah had let fall of her father's threat the night they had talked on the lawn.

Cordelia, who had been so beloved for years by two such persons as Mrs. Vibert and M. Corsand, so passionately adored by Gerard Clayre for a brief, but enchanting, period, felt herself very lonely at this moment.

Was she to spend years in this way. True, she was cared for in one sense, but man does not live by bread alone; and who understood her spiritual needs? Her parents seemed to forget she was not a child, but a woman, with a passionate, violent nature, which required satisfaction, with a keen, powerful mind which sought aliment. Gerard! She would not think of him.

And then to feel how her sister regarded her, and to know that, somehow or other, she had

been the cause of some dispute between that sister and her father.

There was no outlet to the situation. She must remain to bear all these daily, hourly trials. But must she? that was the question. She was past the years of tutelage, and had a right to take her destiny into her own hands. And yet her father had made a great sacrifice for her; ought she not to emulate his generosity, by making a sacrifice of some of her cherished aims to him. It was cowardly to shrink from inevitable suffering. Her thoughts tossed to and fro on this sea of doubt.

The next day she rose with a splitting headache, but with no guiding resolve to fix her actions.

A kind of gloom for some days reigned in the Ferry. It was the pause after the past storm, but it was charged with electricities which might at any time burst forth.

Ivy was so much better, that Mr. Frampton discontinued his visits, and she was able to walk a little.

Miss Ashley had included her in the general sulkiness with which she treated all her family, and it was Cordelia who accompanied her.

She showed her some of her haunts, and they talked of poetry and art and flowers. Ivy was the one piece of sunshine in Cordelia's lot. She

had thoroughly cast away the reserve which she had shown at first. The few years' difference in their age seemed to bind them more closely together. And Cordelia learnt of Ivy. Ivy's was a more equable temper, and a brighter nature. The pansy peaked with jet would have been Cordelia's emblem; the laughing daisy, happy in its life in all places and under all circumstances, was more like Ivy.

Like her namesake, she had the power of strengthening where she clung. Could she have remained at the Ferry, Cordelia would have been contented in some degree; but Aunt Anne was impatient, for the three months had elapsed, and it was settled that as soon as Ivy was quite strong, she was to return to London. Stretched to its utmost limit, this return could not be delayed longer than a week. Ivy had a plan in her head that she would coax Aunt Anne to ask Cordelia to return this visit, and to spend three months with them in London, but she dared not mention it yet. There was a melancholy aroma of parting in these last walks.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE eve of parting had come. Cordelia and Ivy sate together under the great walnut-tree on the lawn.

They were both silent, occupied with their different thoughts, as they sat hand in hand. After all, it was not a parting which would divide them widely. There was the post,—there were hopes of again meeting, either at the Ferry or in London. Yet a weight at their hearts gave a presentiment that it was not so,—that the parting would be certainly a lengthened, perhaps a final one.

Ivy was the first to recover herself.

“How very happy I have been since I have been here! It seems to me that these three months have filled my life with riches. It is best to go perhaps before anything mars this. But I should like to know when we two shall sit here again.”

Poor Ivy! could she have known all that lay before them both before they should sit there again!

"Nothing will mar life with you, Ivy. You have both the faculty for enjoyment and the spirit of content. I am sure, if I took a peep at you in London, even on a foggy day, I should find you smiling and bright, and making the best of it."

"Oh, no!" said Ivy, laughing; "I am often very dull there, and sometimes, I am afraid, a little cross; but then it is so different. It seems to me, Cordelia, that if I could live with you, I should always be happy. That is the secret of life, to be in constant companionship with a mind which grows and which makes ours grow to keep up with it. There is nothing dull and stale then. At home, Aunt Anne is very kind, but she thinks I am a child still, and all her visitors think the same; no one pays any attention to me, but to forbid my doing this, or ordering me to do that. If I had a cold or fever, Aunt Anne would lavish every care on me; but the internal chill and flame one has sometimes in one's soul, she thinks is all nonsense. It is very hard, but you will write to me?"

"Yes."

"But, Cordelia, shall you always stay here? You said, one day, something about a profession,—going on the stage——"

"Ivy, I will ask you a question as one asks an oracle, or as believers in magic look into a crystal ball. Suppose you felt that you had a

gift which entailed a certain responsibility on you, would you use it?"

"Yes."

"If, to use it, it was necessary to act in opposition to those you love?"

There was a pause. At last Ivy looked up.

"Yes, if no higher duty prevents it, and it was only a prejudice that prohibited it."

Cordelia smiled, and pressed her hand. Ivy went on.

"But the difficulty is to know certainly that *no* higher duties intervene. A wife, unless cast off by her husband for ever, cannot flagrantly disobey him."

Cordelia sighed and shivered.

"I do not think," said Ivy gravely, "we either of us know how much I love you, my dearest. Tell me, Cordelia,—I ought to know it,—" and Ivy's usually calm girlish voice deepened into passion, "what is this alienation between you and Gerard. I am his sister,—I am yours. I ought to know it,—I might be of use. Dear Cordelia, you do not know how true and loving a heart Gerard has. He is often impatient, suspicious, and apparently reckless of the feelings of others; but this is when led away by some strong resentment or sense of wrong done to him: prove to him he is in fault, and his repentance is divine. Proud as he is generally, it all breaks

down on such occasions, and the reparation is as ample as the offence has been bitter. Pray forgive him ! ”

“ My darling,” said Cordelia, and her eyes filled with tears, “ I am not ungrateful to you : I love you,—I love your fresh, pure, warm love ; it has been an unexpected happiness,—a sweet and lasting one, I trust : but not even to you can I speak of all which has made me suffer. There are names,—there are circumstances I cannot touch upon.” She shuddered as she spoke. “ When you marry, Ivy, take care of one thing above all, that you marry a man who trusts you, and whom you can trust.”

Cordelia’s eyes were full of tears, but she would not relent.

“ We cannot discuss the point,” she said ; “ we are, at all events, sisters. Are we not, Sarah ? ” she said, as Sarah came up to them.

“ Of course, as your own flesh and blood are not suited to you. It is fortunate that you can find what you need in the family which disowns you. I need a sister, too, but am less fortunate.”

“ Sarah, why do you always misinterpret me ? ”

“ I think I interpret you too clearly ; but an end shall be made of this.”

“ An end ? ”

“ Yes, I shall leave the field open to you. I am tired of this kind of life.”

“What do you mean?”

“This is not the place and time for me to explain myself. I came to tell you tea was ready, Miss Clayre. Will you come?”

They went down. During the evening nothing was said which could either explain or account for this outbreak. Cordelia looked perplexed and pained, and was very silent. Miss Ashley, on the contrary, talked a good deal. Ivy was inexpressibly grieved. To leave Cordelia with all the additional sorrows she had discovered in her fate, the fate of the being who was dearer to her than anyone else, was terrible. How could Cordelia bear it? What had Gerard done? She loved her brother, but she felt sure the wrong must be his. How cruel of him to abandon a creature like this to all the vexations of so anomalous a position. Married, yet without a husband; living in her father's house, but no longer the loved and petted daughter; treated almost like an alien by her sister.

Ivy sat near Cordelia, and her whole attitude was one of caressing love. Miss Ashley soon left the room, and the four who remained were relieved by her absence.

Mrs. Ashley informed her husband, who inquired for his eldest daughter, that poor Sarah had been much annoyed by a visit from some ladies from Brookferry, who had made some

malicious speeches about Mr. Frampton. His defection seemed to have been known. An imprecation rose to his lips, but he controlled himself. Cordelia heard him, and for the first time a light dawned upon her as to the cause of her sister's persistent ill-humour.

She was very thoughtful, and when Ivy bade her good night she looked so pale and anxious, that Ivy would not volunteer, as she had intended, to go in her room the last evening. She kissed her forehead and lips, and the beautiful, dejected face fixed itself on her imagination. Ah, when will she see it again!

When Cordelia had placed the candle on the table, she thought a moment, and then acting on a resolution she had formed, went upstairs to her sister's bed-room.

It was a large bed-room, on the other side of the house, and on another floor. The best bed-room was near it, and other rooms which had been nurseries; but all these were empty now. When Miss Ashley was aware that it was her sister who had knocked, and who, on her reply of admission, had entered, she was surprised, but not displeased. She had been amassing so much in her heart against her, that she was rather glad of the relief of pouring it all out on Cordelia's devoted head.

"Sarah," said Cordelia gravely, "will you

tell me what you meant just now on the terrace?"

"What right have you to know?"

"The right that the person who is accused has of knowing the fault that you blame. Why do you look and speak as if I made your life intolerable?"

Miss Ashley looked at her as she stood, apparently calm, before her, but she saw that the hand which leant against the table trembled.

"Because it is the fact, from the time you were a baby, I have always been sacrificed to you, in every possible way. The only years of happiness I have ever known were those when you were away; and you return to play the same game over again."

"These are heavy accusations, Sarah."

"Then you treat me like a stranger,—scarcely speak to me at all, in fact,—and take into your grand confidences a chit, a mere school-girl."

"I take no one into my confidence."

"You are too sublime, of course; but these airs have tired me out,—I have borne enough. As it seems you have come to live here for good, I shall go."

"Where?"

"I am writing to my aunt in Yorkshire. I must get away from home. I am miserable." Miss Ashley burst into tears.

"Go! how can you leave home?"

"My father has sacrificed me to you; he will not miss me."

"Sacrificed you to me?"

Miss Ashley was maddened at Cordelia's gentle, doubting, and reproving manner. She lost all command over herself, and spoke and looked like a virago.

"Do you pretend not to know it?" and the indignation flamed out on the victim; "do you not know that to pay your husband's beggarly debts—nay, no tragedy airs with me—he paid down, not only the money which was yours, but nearly all mine also. I ask, is that fair?—is that just? Was I never to marry? If I found a man I liked, was I to give him up; for I should be too proud to marry without bringing something to share the general expenses. Why was I debarred from this? Was I incapable of loving? Must I not look forward to do as all women do?"

Cordelia shuddered.

"I should say that my fate might have been a warning. Women can marry, and marry men they love, yet see——" and the noble head bowed low.

Miss Ashley was a little touched.

"But you and I, Cordelia, are very different. I do not seek another sphere from that in which I was born; I am not ambitious."

"Ambitious!—do you think I married from ambition?" Her lips curled with contempt.

"If from love, it was a strange sort of love." Her sister winced, as if she had been touched with a hot iron. "At any rate, from childhood until now you have stood in my way,—you have been the cause of my misery. My father would have struck me the other day, because I spoke my mind to him, though even he knows I am right, and, I believe, repents his rashness. But, at any rate, I am tired of all this, and I will go where it is not always before my eyes, and where everything reminds me of the injustice done to me."

"What was the exact sum my father paid?"

"Eight thousand pounds in all."

"If three thousand were repaid, it would be made right, I suppose?" Cordelia's cheeks were white, and her voice trembled.

"It would be right for me," said Miss Ashley, "in money matters. But nothing can make up the past,—nothing can make my father—love me better than you," she was going to say, but she had the grace to alter the phrase, "do me justice."

"Pause," said her sister, and her voice was hollow; "pause, Sarah! Do not leave your home; no good ever comes of that."

"There is no other way," said Miss Ashley, sullenly.



"If *I* am the cause of your unhappiness, I can alter that. If all will be right if that money is paid back, there may be a means to remedy its loss."

"My father said, the other day, he did not know what had come to the house,—we were all bewitched."

"The evil influence shall be expelled," and Cordelia tapped with her foot on the ground as if she were adding sum to sum on her mind.

"Do not be so mysterious,—I hate mysteries; but in everything you are so foreign,—so unfit for an English home."

"Unfit for an English home! Sarah, do not say anything more. Only promise me one thing," and she laid her hand, cold as ice, on her sister's shoulder; "do not send your letter till to-morrow. Will you promise me?"

"I *cannot* send it till to-morrow;—but why?"

"Never mind. Good night, Sarah." She laid her hand on her sister's head. "I do not think you intended to hurt me. Hush!" she said, "do not speak,—you might be sorry afterwards," and she stooped and kissed her, and left the room.

As she was going into her own room, she met her mother, who started at the tall, slight figure, in white dressing-gown, and taper in hand, that seemed floating towards her.

"Cordelia, it is one o'clock, my child! Have

you been comforting poor Sarah? I have been reading the newspaper to your father till this minute."

Cordelia did not answer, but she put down her light, and clasped her arms round her mother's neck. She kissed her again and again, and, without a word, passed into her room and locked the door.

When Mrs. Ashley took off her collar, it was wet with tears.

CHAPTER XIV.

IVY passed a wakeful night. Poor child! it was the end of her brief holiday. She thought it brief now that it was all over; but so many feelings had been crowded into it,—she felt she had learned so much, such a large knowledge of the beauty of love had been given to her,—that every single week of the three months seemed longer than her whole sleep-life before.

She had been brought nearer to Nature than she had ever been.

There are two kinds of love of nature—a subjective and an objective love. Some very largely gifted organisations may possess both, but usually they are divided. Some persons admire and love it as outside themselves with the same kind of admiration, though more fervent, of course, which they bestow on its painted representation. They are great seekers of the picturesque, and travel in whatever direction the fashion of the day in such things may lead them, and sustain any amount of toil and privation in its pursuit. With them it is an art—with others it is a feeling.

They become part of that which they admire. They possess what that stern Dissenter, John Foster, calls physiopathy—the faculty of sharing the life around them, of living in the multitudinous forms of existence which are rife on all sides of humanity. This Foster, who would have been a poet, had he not been a Baptist Clergyman, must have possessed it. He was in no world-famed scene of beauty when he uttered those words, “What an evening! it is as if the soul of Eloisa was in the air!” and yet what a hushed stillness, though still resonant of the hurry and conflict of the day; what repose, though with a quiver of foregone passion in it, do they suggest.

Ivy had this peculiarity. To sit under a green tree, looking at a lawn covered with daisies, was an enjoyment full of delight to her. To lie on the grass, and watch the flickering of the sunlight through the leaves, was a pleasure akin to rapture. To walk up and down on a moonlit evening on the gravel walk in front of the house, and suddenly to hear a nightingale singing its voluble and eager song, was enough to give a thrill of joy to her heart.

All these seemed to grow in her heart as part of its own pulses. It was essentially a part of Ivy's nature to live out of herself. From no reasoned system of self-devotion, but as an instinct,

she threw herself into the life, into the pains and pleasures of those she loved. In the same fashion, and perhaps with more entireness, she had caught up all this beauty which had greeted her for the first time, and had lived and drawn her breath in it.

It was all over now, though she possessed the memory as a joy for ever. Then these three months had given her a friend, that which she had longed for all her life; one young enough to sympathise with her, yet old enough and superior enough to call out all the admiration as well as the love of the heart. She had obtained this boon in one whose fate had become linked to her own—Gerard's wife. These characters, this life, were so different from the methodic tameness of her aunt's small household. These might be considered ill-bred people, but they were more genuine, and therefore more interesting. She had never heard a raised voice, far less an oath, in all her life before; yet she would rather have asked a favour of Mr. Ashley, with all his out-spokenness, than of her haughty, polished grandfather.

As to Cordelia, she was a genius, an artist, a beauty—she was the embodied ideal of her romantic visions.

She rose very early, and opening her window, sat by it to bathe her forehead with the cool

morning air, and look out for the last time on the garden and fields which lay on that side of the house. The roses were nearly over, but lingered here and there, and exhaled their last, richest fragrance, the summed up sweetness of the ripe summer ! She noticed some unusual sounds in the house, but thought they must proceed from some matutinal arrangements dependent on her own departure. As I said before, her room and Cordelia's were quite away from the other bed-rooms. Those looked on the lawn, while Cordelia's and Ivy's were on the opposite side. It was now only six o'clock, and she would not go to Cordelia's room till just before breakfast. She looked so tired the previous evening, she would not disturb her. She hoped she slept.

Ivy had a few trinkets belonging to her mother, one of these a little gold cross, of which the four points ended in four pearls. She had detached it from a chain, and had packed it up to leave as a parting gift with Cordelia. She shed a few natural tears over it, but buoyed herself up against the pang of parting, by thinking of her purpose to ask Aunt Anne to invite Cordelia to town. She thought, too, how she would write to her brother, and tell him all she felt for his beautiful wife. He had only written once to her, and never, as far as she knew, to his wife. She had made all her little arrangements, when, on hearing



the unexpected sound of wheels, she looked out, and saw the little carriage driving back to the stables which were just within view of the window. She wondered why it had been used so early, in that kind of aimless, half-dreamy way we think sometimes. There are surface thoughts and basis thoughts. The idea of leaving the Ferry in four hours (the train went at ten) underlying all the transitory surmises which rose in her mind.

In her innocent devotions that morning, how earnestly she had prayed for Cordelia. Prayers for her happiness, for her reconciliation with her husband, for blessings on her wherever she went, and on whatever she might undertake.

The clock striking half-past eight roused her from her meditations, and she began putting the last touch to her preparations. The carpet-bag was finally closed, the travelling-bag was placed beside her hat and cloak, the last look at empty drawers given, lest some important item should have been omitted—all those feminine cares which occupy women when they leave a place were concluded, and she left her room and knocked at Cordelia's.

There was no answer, but she opened the door nevertheless.

What were Ivy's feelings as she stood on the threshold of the room! The windows were still closed, but the light from the chinks of the

shutters and the opened door revealed the confusion within.

Half-opened empty drawers, a table with its cover half on the ground, and empty of the desk and books which always were there, a bed evidently unslept on, the chimney-piece vacant of its beautiful engraving, torn papers and a general confusion were the objects that met Ivy's eye.

What can have happened? was her first thought. She made a step into the room, and on the mantelpiece saw a letter addressed to herself.

She seized it: and taking it to her room, closed the door. It ran thus:—

“When you read this, my dearest Ivy, I shall be many miles on my way to—where? A resolution which has been long my intention was hastened accidentally to a decision last night. I do not know when I shall return, if ever; but I did not choose to go without telling you how I love and value you, and that I shall not have a happier moment in all my life to come, than that in which we shall meet again. Many reasons forbid my telling you where I go, or what my future plans may be; but you may rely they are in nothing unbecoming your sister.

“CORDELIA.”

It was a shock. Ivy sat on her chair by her bed, and sobbed. The suddenness, the irrepres-

sible anxieties about the future, were all too sharply felt at first to admit of any other image than Cordelia friendless, a wanderer, and homeless.

She wrung her hands at her own folly in not having gone to her room the moment she awoke. She might have seen her once more.

She felt at last it was getting so late she must go downstairs. She had been forgotten, and no sound had announced breakfast. The whole house seemed wrapt in preternatural calm.

When, however, she opened the door of the dining-room, she saw that the evil tidings were known.

Mrs. Ashley sate, white as a sheet, by the table. Miss Ashley was not in her place, but sobbing on the sofa, with her face pressed among the pillows.

Mr. Ashley, with a red spot on either cheek (the unfailing sign of great agitation with him), and in a trembling voice, was questioning Snip, the groom, who stood within the door, balancing himself on one leg, and scratching his head in perplexity. No one took any notice of her.

"Miss Cordelia ordered me, sir, to prepare the chaise; and I got up and obeyed her, if you please."

"What time was it?"

"If you please, it was five o'clock."

"When did she come down?"

"We left at six, if you please."

"What did she say?"

"She said, if you please, 'bring them boxes down, Snip.' They were two boxes and a bag, as light as a feather, if you please."

"And no one heard you."

"I think not; noways, I saw no one. Miss Cordelia said, 'Be very quiet, Snip; you must not wake the family,' if you please."

"At what o'clock did the train leave?"

"6·40, if you please."

"That'll do, you d—d fool, be off. Let the carriage be got ready. I shall accompany you to town, Miss Clayre. You have heard the news, I suppose?"

Ivy's eyes told she knew it.

"I cannot understand it. She has written half-a-dozen words to me, and is gone no one knows where. Oh, I could curse that foreign education. When has such a thing been heard of? A woman, who had everything her heart could desire—a home, every comfort—to go off on some fantastical crotchet! She was always a self-willed, imperious ——. No matter, I will let her go; she is no more daughter of mine."

"My dear," interposed the soft voice of Mrs. Ashley, "we don't know all that may have influenced her: but seek her you must."

"Where is her note to me," said Mr. Ashley, "Snip gave it me half an hour ago? Here it is."

"MY DEAR FATHER.

"Do not be angry with me, if I am anxious no longer to be a burden on you all. You have done enough, more than enough for me; it is but fair I should help myself. I have health, strength, and youth, and the fixed resolve to strive. I trust I may succeed in the aim I have put before me. Till then I shall remain away from you all. Do not judge me harshly. If I were your son, you would applaud me. Do not be less just to your daughter,

"CORDELIA."

Ivy read it silently. She could not speak.

Mr. Ashley was moved by her emotion. "Don't fret, she liked you very much, I could see. I shall try if I can find out anything in London. By that early train there are few passengers; the men at the terminus may have noticed her, and I may reach her yet. I must hurry you, Miss Clayre; we have only five minutes."

He left to make some hurried preparations, and Mrs. Ashley took a silent but affectionate leave of Ivy. Miss Ashley rose from the sofa and shook hands with her. Her face looked so sorrowful that Ivy was touched, in spite of the dislike she had always felt for her.

"Let me hear if you hear," she said.

"Yes," she interrupted hastily; but I feel there is no chance, if you only knew——"

But her sobs again interrupted her, and she could not proceed.

Ivy got into the chaise with Mr. Ashley, and strained her eyes, as he rapidly drove away, to take her last look of the house.

Her companion was silent, lost in sorrowful meditations.

"My dear," he said at last, turning kindly towards her, "Will you tell your brother what has happened?"

"Oh, how shall I!" was Ivy's involuntary exclamation.

"It is a hard task, my dear; but I own I cannot; besides I am rather sore with your brother. There is something in his conduct I do not understand; still he has of course the right to know that Cordelia is gone."

"Cordelia is gone!" What a melancholy burden was that to all Ivy's thoughts on her way to London.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

THE day after Ivy's arrival in Welbeck Street was Sunday. The sensations with which she walked side by side with her aunt towards the church of Marylebone were like those of a person in a dream.

The entire sameness of everything around her, and the utter change in herself, was something marvellous. There was her aunt in the same black silk dress, black silk shawl, and white bonnet (which she remembered was her unvarying Sunday costume), walking in the same stately manner beside her. Aunt Anne always looked as if she were performing her quota to the maintenance of Christianity in England by this Sunday pilgrimage. She never rose early enough to breakfast with Ivy any other day, but on Sunday she descended fully equipped for her Sabbath exertions. It seemed to bear in her eyes

the aspect of a feudal service. This homage was rendered for the sake of certain advantages of which it secured the tenure. To confess oneself a miserable sinner once a week, gave one a charter, by which one could be quite at ease for the other six days. No moths could get into a conscience so regularly aired.

Ivy trod the same quiet street, whose iron gates kept up an artificial privacy and gentility which made it dulness itself; she drew the same free breath when she turned into that vulgar, noisy New Road full of omnibuses, and carts, and all sorts of desecrations, which, even in that brief space, gave Aunt Anne a headache (so she said), and looked across the broad flagstones of York Gate to the dusty green of the Regent's Park trees.

Over the Communion-table hung the picture of the Holy Family, which somewhat jarred on the prejudices of the rabid Protestants, but which had given Ivy her first faint notions of pictured beauty. There was a graceful droop of the Virgin's figure bending over the child, which had pleased her in spite of the denunciations of critics. Now she saw it with other eyes. Westall no more limited her conceptions as to art than this weekly routine, her aspirations as to religion. There was the great organ, with its huge brass tubes, which had been the mingled fear and wonder of her childhood. What connection that

mighty volume of sound which filled the church had with that enormous machine, and with the mysterious movements of a small man who sat behind red curtains in a small gallery over her favourite picture, with his back to the whole church, and evidently not praying, she never could in those days understand. There was another man of whom she caught glimpses behind the crowd of charity girls, who also seemed very busy, but not in prayer either. He looked as if he were amusing himself at some game, and was the object of both envy and curiosity. Then, again, there was the carved roof, to which Aunt Anne always raised her eyes when the word "Heaven" was pronounced, so that Ivy had imagined it was heaven *tout de bon*. How she used to stare at it, and wonder if any glimpse of the cherubs and angels would be vouchsafed to her through the chinks which had been left for the purposes of ventilation. Every year had set her farther from that vision. And now as she looked upwards and around, the only face she thought of was Cordelia's.

"What are you staring at, my dear?" said Aunt Anne, nudging her; for Ivy was so lost in thought, she had not stirred when the singing was over, and the congregation had taken their places for the sermon.

It is evident that Ivy was not an attentive

listener, or a well disciplined church-goer. She never had been. She could pray for a few minutes fervently, but was very uncertain and spasmodic in her attention. Her aunt said, that sometimes she repeated the prayers in such a loud voice that she was quite ashamed, it was like being at a Methodist chapel; and at other times she looked so inanimate she thought she must be asleep. She carried a want of manners, her aunt averred, into everything. When the service was over, they returned to an early dinner, which was an institution which had been adopted that the cook might practise the same observances that her mistress had done, only post-meridionally, and then Aunt Anne folded herself up on the sofa, and dozed till tea. Ivy sat with a book on a low chair by the window. This was her habitual custom, and usually she had quite absorbed herself in her book, but on this particular Sunday she could give it little attention.

She was trying to arrange the proportions of her life. It was all out of perspective. All to which she had hitherto been accustomed had shrunk into infinitesimal proportions, while the last three months seemed to occupy her whole being. She had always been considered a lively, cheerful girl; but it seemed that, till she had gone to the Ferry, she had not known the first letters of the alphabet of enjoyment and happiness. It

struck her, too, as strange, that no one remarked any change in herself. Her aunt had told her to make haste to go to bed, and to put her things tidily by, just in the same tone as usual.

She had said, "You are rather sunburned, Ivy; you must wear your veil down for a little while. It is astonishing how soon girls of your complexion become coarse-looking." That was all. No; the first night Jones had said, while she was unpacking her clothes, and arranging them in their primitive order, "I don't think the country 'as agreed with you, miss, leastways *I* don't; you are taller and thinner, and your eyes are brighter, but your cheeks are paler. Lord ha' mercy on us! what a mess to be sure your things are in!"

Ivy felt so differently from the Ivy who sat on the selfsame chair three months back, that she was astonished that her appearance had not changed enough for her aunt to remark it. But it would have required some extraordinary transformation for it to do so.

Ivy looked at her aunt as she slept on the sofa. Her face was turned towards her. It was a face from which all expression and individuality had faded as thoroughly as colour from a washed-out dress. It was not the quiet, gentle expression of Mrs. Ashley, which was a character in itself; it was a face which belonged essentially to the class to which her aunt belonged. That

numerous class of well-born women, who, till the death of their parents, are accustomed to luxuries, and to a certain state, but on that event, if not married, sink down at once into the dismal caste of poor spinsters: all Aunt Anne's modes of thought belonged to this set of people. She lived with great economy, but certain traditional expenses were incurred as obligations, and were binding as religious dogmas. She always wore silk stockings, she never went out in a cab or omnibus. For the visits which she paid once a month, she hired that mysteriously named vehicle a "fly." Tortoise, would have been the best appellation. Ivy was not "out," and could without derogation, as yet, wear cotton hose, and occasionally enter a cab; but an omnibus was prohibited even to her.

This dignity entailed some sacrifices on the subject of candles and lamps and fire; and in butter and sugar and some articles of food, the economy bordered upon avarice. And fires! The extravagance of having more than one fire was never indulged in. An illusory and satanic apology for a fire in the shape of half-a-dozen red coals in a machine called a "basket," which was placed morning and evening in Aunt Anne's bed-room, was the only infringement to this rule. A fire proper was lit in the drawing-room, and dinner was surreptitiously devoured in the back

drawing-room. If any visitor happened to call at that time, there was a hasty shutting of the folding-doors, so that no trace of the clandestine repast should be visible, and the repast was of too anti-savoury a description to intrude on the olfactory nerves. But all domestic arrangements were trusted to Jones, and nothing disturbed Aunt Anne's serenity. She was not of a strong physique, and took little exercise, so her life was about as interesting as a piece of whity-brown paper. It was not bright, nor could it be called dark. Her face was of the same drab tint. The features were regular, but the hair, eyes, cheeks, were all of the same colourless hue. She had never been angry in her life. The greatest condemnation she ever pronounced was, "How *odd* so and so is!" To be singular was to be criminal. She sometimes entreated Ivy not to excite herself, and she said, as the ultimate warning, "You will be considered odd." To be considered odd, and to have *no* manners, were Aunt Anne's notions of utter reprobation. The virtues of a saint and the sufferings of a martyr would have left her entirely untouched and unmoved, if accompanied by any derelictions from that code which she mysteriously denominated "manner." Ivy's want of manner was a serious sorrow to her. A sorrow and a perplexity.

Ivy looked and wondered how the face of

Cordelia would have appeared in that little drawing-room, and wondered still more what impression she would make on Aunt Anne. She longed for her aunt to wake up that she might ask her whether she had been pleased with Gerard's wife or not.

At last it struck seven, and Aunt Anne awoke. She always had done so at that hour for years. The tea usually followed immediately. "What can Bessie be about," she said, "it is ten minutes after seven?"

"Shall I ring, aunt?"

"No; she knows it is tea-time; let us wait and see."

They waited till a quarter past, and then till twenty minutes past, and then till the half-hour itself had struck.

"My watch must be fast," said Aunt Anne, "it is impossible it should be so late"—when the door opened, and Bessie, very flushed and very much out of breath, made her appearance with the tea-tray.

Aunt Anne held out her watch. It was a silent but effective rebuke.

"I knows it, ma'am, I am late; please, ma'am, don't be angry; but it is not my fau't."

"Not your fault, Bessie, how can that be?"

"I run all the way, ma'am; yes, indeed, Miss Ivy; but after the church there was a karteichising of some of the ragged schools."

"Do you go to a Methodist's chapel, Bessie?" said Aunt Anne, drawing her black silk dress closely round her.

"No, ma'am, it is the usual church—the church the gentry goes to; but the curate, ma'am, said it was the middle Sunday, and was the day for kartechising the children; and I got so interested, ma'am, I could not leave. No one did. They were real ladies who brought up the children to be kartechised."

"Indeed! Very odd, indeed."

"I assure you, ma'am, they were."

"Another time, Bessie, manage for us to have tea at the same hour as usual. I do not like to change my hour."

"What made it so long, ma'am, there were some foreigners present, who would ask questions, too, for they wanted to have the like in their own country. Very fine-looking men, Miss; very handsome, though they be Papists, as I heard. One seemed to know all about it, and talked a good deal to the curate. He had grey hair, iron grey; but looked young, for all that. He spoke English, too, for I heard him myself."

"Very well. Bring up the boiling water in a quarter of an hour."

The silver urn was of course only brought out on grand occasions; for everyday use, the bright

shining kettle took its two journeys to and from the kitchen.

"Aunt Anne," said Ivy, suddenly, "did you ever see Cordelia?"

"Cordelia?"

"Yes. Gerard's wife, my sister-in-law."

"Ah! I could not think who you were speaking of. No, I have not seen her."

"She is lovely."

"Ivy, how often must I tell you not to exaggerate! She is a fine young woman, I suppose:—tall, and well dressed."

"But, Aunt, she is more than that; she has beautiful hair and complexion, and eyes and figure."

"I dare say; it does not matter much. Gerard was most imprudent marrying so young, and without a profession."

"But he has a profession now."

"Now; but he might, had he remained single, have gone into the Foreign Office, or been an attaché to some embassy instead of being a soldier. And then he got into some imprudent trouble about money. Signed his name."

Aunt Anne spoke as if he had signed away his soul.

"Is it not best to be a soldier?"

"It was a perfect sacrifice marrying as he did."

"You cannot think how kind they were to me

at the Ferry. I got so fond of them all. As to Cordelia——”

“ They would be kind, of course. It is a great thing for them to have married their daughter into our family. Will you have some more tea ? ”

“ No, thank you. I wish, Aunt Anne, if——”

“ If what ? ”

“ Nothing. I should have so liked Cordelia to come and stay here for awhile.”

“ Here ! You are the oddest girl. How could she come here ? She is not in society, you know. Living with her husband, he might get her received ; but coming alone here is out of the question. What should we do with her ? ”

Ivy sighed. She knew there was no appeal from that sentence.

After a little desultory conversation, they separated. Aunt Anne went to bed an hour earlier than usual on Sundays ; and, in accordance with this arrangement, Jones attended on her, and Bessie on Ivy.

During the week Jones had time to wait on Ivy—brush her beautiful thick hair, fold up her clothes, and take away her light before “ Missus ” rung.

While Bessie was performing these duties, she looked anxiously ready to be communicative.

“ Were you never before at any catechising of children ? ” said Ivy, languidly.

"Never, Miss. Oh, dear! it is beautiful. To think what those children knows! They answers everything, and not a bit shy. Such pretty voices, Miss. There were some quite old girls, quite as old as me, Miss, among them; but they did not answer better nor the young uns."

"I should like to go once."

"Would you, Miss? Ask Missus. It will be this day month."

"My aunt does not like me to go to church in the afternoon. I am afraid she will not allow me to go."

"There's no harm, sure. Perhaps it may come round as you may go, Miss; some Sunday when Missus dines with Sir Arthur."

Bessie was an optimist. To such both the present anticipation and future attainment are always identical. Verily, they have their reward.

CHAPTER II.

SIR ARTHUR was Ivy's grandfather. He was her aunt Anne's brother. Aunt Anne was therefore her great-aunt; but she was so much younger than Sir Arthur, that she was always called "Aunt." He had married a second time in advanced life, and had a young family, who quite absorbed his time and attention. His two sons were both dead. One, the eldest, had married a woman of large fortune; and his son Norton, Sir Arthur's heir, was brought up at Clayre Court with his youthful uncles and aunts. The second had disgraced himself by marrying a beggar, and had died in debt and in difficulties. The wife, fortunately, had died too; and Sir Arthur had paid his son's debts, and placed his two orphan children with his sister Anne. He had paid Gerard's schooling, and had made him a small allowance till the scandalous affair of his marriage, when he withdrew it. After two or three months, however, he was shamed out of his callousness by Mr. Ashley's liberality, and had purchased a commission for him; but then made it distinctly understood that

his duty to his own family strictly forbade his paying one farthing more for Gerard Clayre. This commission would have been of little use, had not Mr. Ashley paid Gerard's heavy debts, and enabled him to join his regiment. But Sir Arthur abandoned him at once. He might sink or swim, but the grandfatherly heart and purse were irrevocably closed to him.

He occasionally made Ivy a present, but never troubled himself further about her. Anne managed very well, and when the time came she would be presented, and—(she was a fine, well-grown girl)—might marry well if she had sense, and none of Gerard's flighty ideas. He had eschewed inviting her to the Court. Norton, her cousin, was three or four years older than herself, and irreparable mischief might be done. Norton had his mother's fortune, to be sure ; but it was desirable that he should make a brilliant match.

The “*mésalliances*” made by Gerard and Gerard's father had sufficiently disgraced the family. It would be of great advantage to Sir Arthur's younger children, if Norton married well. If he died unmarried, his mother's fortune reverted to her own family ; but there were three thousand pounds (a legacy from his maternal grandfather), which would revert, of course, to Sir Arthur.

Occasionally Sir Arthur spent a week or two in London. He had a town house, though it

was rarely used, and then Miss Clayre dined with him once or twice. His wife did not like her sister-in-law, and this was the only fraternal attention he could show her ; but he never asked Ivy. He did not know how to treat girls of that age. They were neither grass nor hay ; they could not be played with as little children, and they could not be spoken to as young ladies. Ivy, too, had something about her, probably derived from her plebeian mother, which he did not admire. Something very like assurance, and an indifference to outward circumstances, which bordered on vulgarity. He was afraid Anne was right when she piteously asserted that she feared Ivy was "odd, and would always be deficient in manner."

The day hoped by Bessie had arrived, and had fulfilled her hope in every way. Missus *was* to dine with Sir Arthur, and it was on a Sunday,—and yet more, on her Sunday. It was her turn to go to evening church.

"What shall I do this afternoon ?" said Ivy to her aunt. "May I take a walk with Bessie ?"

"No, my dear ; Sunday is not a day for young ladies to go out walking. So many persons are about the streets on that day. You may go to afternoon church, if you like," she added, thinking it was a safe spot for depositing her, and having entirely forgotten the "kartechising."

They went. Ivy with no particular idea of what she was going to hear.

After the service was over, the congregation maintained their seats, and the schools to be examined came forward. They were a tidy set of children, led up by ladies who had diligently taught them, and their answers were ready and intelligent. Still, to Ivy there was something stiff and mechanical in it. She wondered whether those words repeated so glibly by rote had meaning to the little lips which uttered them.

She watched, however, so intensely, and her eagerness had led her so forward among the ranks, that she found herself in the front file of the audience.

The clergyman—a shy, short-sighted man—when he had finished with the little band of scholars before him, said, turning round to those nearest to him : “If you have time to spare, will you come across with me to —— Street, and we will examine a class more destitute than these, and therefore with even more claims on our charity and instruction ?” He made a wave of his hand, which included Ivy, and she followed with Bessie.

In a long, low room, which looked like a barn, about forty ragged children were assembled. They were evidently of the lowest class. Though it was Sunday, they had no change of clothes to put on,

but wore the same filthy rags which they had on during all the week ; yet it was touching to see that all had contrived to wash their faces and smooth their hair, and to look clean, though they could not help looking ragged.

They were the very offscourings of the parish population ; those boys and girls who swarm in our mews and rows and back streets, and who seem the produce of the dirt in which they move and have their being. Children whose hungry faces stare at one through the panes of bakers' and pastrycooks' shops, and who are seen, the moment a penny has been given them, carrying it to a gin palace—even at that age they have learned that there is both meat and drink in that fiery liquid ;—children who seem gathered from the mud of all regions, so many foreign faces are among them—Jews, Gentiles, Negroes, Hindoos—like the miscellaneous spawn which some great wave throws on the shore before it recedes.

One or two ladies had assembled them, and they were waiting for the clergyman. Three times a week they met in that room for two hours in the evening. Not much was learned, but the very habit of attendance was something, and gradually more would be done.

On all the young faces want and squallor and latent disease had left indelible marks. Peaked chins, narrow foreheads, stooping chests—all

those fearful marks that proved, alas ! that in sin and in misery they had been conceived and brought forth. How many generations of improved education would it take to restore them, or rather to lead them step by step to something of the condition of ordinary children ! Ivy looked attentively at them, as, after a preliminary prayer, the clergyman commenced his task of examination.

Suddenly her attention was attracted by a pair of flashing dark eyes, and a gaunt face which she remembered dimly, but which she felt sure she had seen before.

She looked again ; at last she perceived who it was : it was the Italian boy she had met on the beach at the Ferry. What a curious thrill of acquaintanceship it gave her ! That letter, that sprain, all that had brought her nearer to Cordelia. She smiled kindly on him, and when the examination was over—his answers having been given with much gesticulation and some confusion of words—she went up to him and said she was glad to find him there.

In broken English he answered her that he had attended this school two or three months before he had been down at Brookferry.

“ And what do you do to earn money ? ”

“ I carry message ; hold 'orse.”

“ Have you no friends ? ”

"Yes; one or two Italians, my uncle, and one good friend."

"Who?"

"M. Corsand."

Ivy started at that name.

"Is M. Corsand in London?" she said, and a hope darted through her mind that, perhaps, he might know of Cordelia's whereabouts.

"Yes, I think so; but I have not seen him for one week."

"I should like to write to him, if you will give me his address."

"Altro! a street—come si chiama—a street, near park."

"Which park?"

"Great Park."

"Hyde Park?"

"Si, Signora."

"But what street?"

"I know no name, but if the Signora will give me the letter, I will give it him."

"Come, Miss," interposed Bessie, "we must not wait no longer. Jones will be wondering and worreting."

"No," said Ivy to the boy, "I can not do that; but ask him to write his address for you, and bring it here next time."

"It will be a month before I can come here."

"Here, then," said Ivy, and she tore off a

slip of paper—in fact, the fly-leaf of her Bible, and wrote over her name in it, “Will M. Corsand give Mrs. Clayre’s address, her present address, if he knows it, to Ivy Clayre, 16, Welbeck Street.”

Bessie hurried her home. Ivy knew not if Jones had thought them late or not, for she never heard anything about it. She sate with a lighter heart, thinking she might now have a chance of knowing something about Cordelia.

A month had passed since she had left the Ferry, and she had heard nothing from them. She had written, but her letter had remained unanswered. She had a fear therefore that nothing satisfactory had been heard. To be so utterly divided from all which principally occupied her thoughts was the worst feature of her return to London. A whole world of thoughts, aspirations, and resolves were fermenting in Ivy’s mind while she still went on her dull round of plodding lessons, but she herself was scarcely conscious of them. Life was opening for her with a whole crowd of desires and intentions, which would have paralysed Aunt Anne and exasperated Sir Arthur, if he could have imagined them.

Ivy was dreaming of independence, of use to others; life seemed to her a possession which must be employed. She looked beyond the orbit

of a girl's usual destiny, and with a rare good sense, imagined what would be her lot when she was as old as her Aunt Anne. "Supposing I do not marry, and why should I not remain single, could I lead a life like hers?"

Ivy shuddered.

"I have no genius, no gifts, like Cordelia; but surely I can do something. I could teach—ah, if I knew anything. I could work; I could help persons who had a large family. Even if I have a little money, and do not require to earn it, I must do something for others. I might teach poor children reading, &c. At all events, I will live in the country, it seems easier there to do what one likes."

Ivy's notions were very crude, but she was firm in her resolves. She used to laugh at herself, and call herself a pauper fine lady when she felt, as she did at times, that but for the tiny allowance Aunt Anne gave her for her dress, she had not a farthing. Aunt Anne looked at the quarterly accounts, and when she had seen the large sum of five shillings given to an Italian boy, she had expressed something of displeasure. "If you can give five shillings away in that headlong manner, you are not fit to be trusted with money. Be just before you are generous."

Aunt Anne had no particular meaning when she uttered this aphorism. It was one of those cut-

and-dried phrases which become rooted in minds of a certain calibre, and are used without any reference to any particular connection they may have with the subject to which they are applied—clumsy pieces of artillery, which explode without aim or purpose. The racy proverbs so quaintly but efficiently used by primitive people, give a point and an originality to their conversation; but the clap-trap worn-out truisms with which certain feeble-minded women interlard their admonitions and warnings, are as savourless and as little nutritious as husks.

The next morning at breakfast Aunt Anne asked Ivy, mysteriously, if she knew anything of Mrs. Gerard Clayre?

“No, but I have inquired——”

“There is no occasion to inquire. Sir Arthur says that he has heard from those persons at the Ferry, and that Mrs. Clayre has left it. We, of course, know nothing about her, and I am best pleased it should be so. There is no occasion that we should be tied to every one Gerard chooses to connect himself with.”

“Every one!” said Ivy, indignantly. “Cordelia is his wife. She is my sister. How can I help being connected with her?”

“That is precisely what I lament. In a legal point of view, of course, there is a connection. If she were to die, we should wear mourning—if

we knew it; but in a social sense, I deny all tie with her."

"Aunt Anne!"

"I cannot expect a young girl like you to understand all this, but you will as you grow up. How old are you?"

"I shall be seventeen in two months."

"You are certainly taller than I was at your age. I should not think you would grow much more."

So the conversation ended. It was impossible to make any impression on Aunt Anne. She was never unkind, never angry, but she viewed everything from such a worldly point that at times she appeared thoroughly heartless. She was not so. Where her education and the conventionalities among which she had been bred allowed it, she was kind, and loved those she was permitted to love, feebly it is true, but sincerely. She had quite identified herself with Ivy's interests, had bequeathed to her the small independence she possessed, and she thought she was acting towards her with the most judicious care. The fact is, if you tie up a limb it becomes contracted; and half of Aunt Anne's mind and heart had been strait-waistcoated from her birth.

The set of which she is one is every day lessening in its numbers. The facilities for travelling, the spread of literature, the opinions as

to women's employments and professions which have leavened the whole of the very society which sometimes repudiates them, have altered the tone and enlarged the sphere of our spinsters ; but here and there we find specimens of what women were.

It is rare, however, that two persons, types of a past and present generation, can be so closely compared as Ivy and her Aunt. Ivy's "oddness" was attributed by Aunt Anne to her having been sent, from the age of twelve to fourteen, to a boarding-school, in which, though the number of pupils was carefully limited, she had reason to think that a bookseller's two daughters had been admitted. This had been the seed from which she could trace a good many of Ivy's peculiar and rather vulgar ideas and tastes, and her total want of manner.



CHAPTER III.



DAYS passed, and Ivy had heard nothing of M.

Corsand. She wondered to herself whether he really knew nothing of Cordelia, or she indulged herself in the hope that perhaps there was some fault in the messenger; or that M. Corsand had not returned. She had at last had a letter from the Ferry. It was from Miss Ashley. Her father had been seriously ill since his return, and had not been able to write, and they had all been too anxious to do so. Nothing had been heard of Cordelia. Miss Ashley's letter was brief and cold, but there was nothing antagonistic or disagreeable in it. The evident unhappiness which it betrayed touched Ivy. She wrote an answer immediately, and mentioned her having applied to M. Corsand. Miss Ashley replied by return of post:—"If you do learn anything, let me know directly, but do not mention the name of Corsand. I do not know what my father fears or thinks, but I incautiously took up your letter and read it to him, and he flew into a rage, which brought on a relapse, which has filled us with anxiety."

But the days passed, and no answer came. Ivy watched the postman and explored the letter-box. Fortunately, she had always made this her duty, and the only fragment of liberty she enjoyed was the perusal unintruded on of her own letters. This had been stipulated for by her brother. She mentioned the name of her correspondent, and read in peace.

Waiting for a letter is one of the most irritating trials to one's patience in London. To hear all day long the sharp sudden ring at almost every house in the street at such brief intervals that one can scarcely believe the next post has commenced its rounds. To hear the sound at one's door, and to find that the one longed-for letter is not there. This hope, ever disappointed, yet ever renewed, is a torture which might figure beside those of Tantalus and Sisyphus.

Once, when Ivy was reading the newspaper to her aunt, she made an exclamation and a start. Amongst the names of the persons present at some scientific meeting was the name of Corsand. The meeting was at Birmingham. A fresh spring of hope rose in her heart. He might not have returned, and had not, therefore, received her note. She felt as if she indubitably knew that he could give the information required. She read the newspapers more and more attentively, that

she might perchance find some clue to his address. But his name was not again repeated.

The month had passed, and in the vain hope of seeing the Italian boy again, she thought she would ask Aunt Anne to let her go to the catechising of the children on the following Sunday. She had told her she had been on the Sunday she had dined with Sir Arthur, but her aunt had made no comment.

"May I go this afternoon, Aunt Anne, with Bessie to hear the children?"

"What amusement can it be to you, my dear? You know all they are going to say."

"Yes, but it is very interesting to hear them answer so intelligently; and some of them are quite little children. I only hope I shall answer as well when I am confirmed. Besides," said Ivy, "there is an Italian boy in the ragged school—the boy I gave the five shillings to, aunt—who knows a person who I think would be able to tell——"

"What a long story, Ivy. If you think it may teach you something, you can go."

Aunt Anne had a dim idea that some peculiarly strict religious observances should precede the rite of confirmation, and consented.

After all, if that was Ivy's whim, she might be indulged. It was in the parish church, and under the management of the parish clergyman.

The fact that it was the parish clergyman gave the incumbent infallibility in the idea of Aunt Anne. Had you invited her to hear St. Paul himself in some other church, she would have flatly refused. She seriously disapproved of the habit of running about after preachers, as she called it. Religion did not consist in the mere act of going to church, but going to your own parish church—that was the Shibboleth.

Ivy felt it was a tacit deception not to make her fully understand the purpose for which she wished to go. Ivy's truthfulness was in letter and spirit perfect, without flaw, an entire chrysolite. She paused, and began timidly, for she feared she was going to say that which would bring a veto on her plan, and it was her last hope.

"I hope I may meet among the children a boy——"

"There, there, my dear, that's enough. I am very tired. Shut the door gently, and I shall try to sleep a little."

There was no difficulty in accomplishing this post-prandial Sabbatical observance, for she was dozing before Ivy had left the room.

"I will make her understand the moment I return," thought Ivy.

How springily she walked down the street, with the thought that she might find the cause of this silence on M. Corsand's part!

Ivy was anxious about Cordelia. Not that she anticipated any evil happening to her of the ordinary kind. She felt that Cordelia had resources, and her inexperience exaggerated the rapidity with which they would become available. But she mourned, as regarded her sister-in-law, the isolation from all who were bound to her, the solitude, the friendlessness of the fate she had chosen; and, for her own self, Ivy deplored the dreary desolation of a separation unrelieved by letters.

Ivy did not know it, or rather did not explain it to herself, but those blue spaces in the sky above did not more raise it from the usual heavy low clouds which darkened it, than did the thought of Cordelia exalt and give breadth to her life. With Cordelia was freedom, aspiration, growth. Without her was a dull and life-palsying uniformity.

It must be confessed that her attention was somewhat distracted during the service, and that the length of the sermon wearied her. How glad she was when the catechising commenced! The children, however, seemed slower than on the first Sunday. At last the clergyman made the same move as before, and a few ladies followed him through the vestry and a back-door into the neighbouring street, and from thence into the narrow mews in which the ragged-school class was held.

Ivy's breath almost stopped as she entered. She looked round, and, to her dismay, there was no Italian boy. The certainty with which she had leant on that hope was snapt as a staff in her hand, and she had fallen from her height of hope.

The first disappointment was most keen. She closed her eyes, for she felt the tears would come. Then she must inquire. She waited with impatient patience, if it may be so termed, till it was all over, and then she turned to the shy clergyman, and inquired timidly for the Italian boy she had seen there that day month.

He hesitated, and looked round. He had not missed him evidently. "I cannot say. These children are allowed such freedom in coming and going. I will inquire." He did, but no satisfactory answer was given. For some time no one identified him, and when it was ascertained that it was "Carlo," nothing was known, he had not been seen for a week or so.

"He is a sad vagabond, maam," said one of the teachers. "Sometimes he comes and seems quite attentive, and then no one catches sight of him for ever so long. It's my opinion he gets sent to gaol between times."

Ivy felt indignant, but was obliged to resign herself. She walked home slowly and thoughtfully. Her attendant entreated her not to "lag" so, or missus would be put out about the tea.

When she got to the house she went straight up into her own bed-room, and sat down to reflect on what she should next do. It was useless to mention anything to Aunt Anne now. But the cord was broken which had upheld her ever since she had first heard the boy name M. Corsand. Cordelia was thoroughly out of reach. She could not help a few natural tears. It was all over, and she must think of the past three months as an isolated fact in her life with which she had no longer any connection. The link was gone. What must be done now. She thought, at all events, if I never see Cordelia again, her influence has been on my life, and *that* is in my own power to keep. I will treasure it and act as if I did. She would not like to see me sitting in this idle, helpless way. I will go down and fetch a book till tea is ready.

She went down to the back drawing-room. She used it as a kind of school-room, and her books were always kept there. She went down softly, for she thought her aunt might still be asleep. It wanted still a quarter of an hour to tea-time. She opened the door noiselessly, and stepped lightly across the room.

To her surprise, her aunt was sitting upon the sofa, and talking, but not in her usual languid manner. Beside her, on an arm-chair, sat a gentleman, a stranger. He did not turn round, so she

only saw his profile. Marked, massive features, hair iron-grey, and thin at the temples, gave the outline of a fine head, in which the organs of firmness and conscientiousness, and perhaps also self-esteem, were strikingly developed. The mouth was covered with a moustache of the same colour as the hair, but the pointed beard was almost black. The eye-brows were straight and dark. The lines on the brow and round the eyes were deeply indented, and told of suffering and thought; but the figure was erect and younger-looking than might have been expected from the aspect of the face.

"Is that you, Ivy?" said Aunt Anne's toneless voice. "Come here. Let me introduce you to my niece, Ivy Clayre. Ivy, this is a very, very old friend of mine, M. Corsand."

It required, it must be confessed, no ordinary amount of self-control for Ivy to restrain the exclamation on her lips.

The surprise, the agitated joy blanched her face to the lips, as she came slowly forward.

M. Corsand looked up, and when her eyes met his, the frank kind glance of those keen hazel eyes had recognition in them. It was the gentleman she had met in the train going down to the Ferry.

"I met this young lady in a railroad carriage some months ago. I did not know then I might

have claimed acquaintance with her on the strength of our old companionship."

M. Corsand was too punctiliously sincere to use the word friendship.

The distinction passed unheeded by Aunt Anne.

"I was younger than you, Ivy, when I was sent to school in Paris, and spent all my holidays with M. Corsand's mother. What happy days those were! I was two years at school in Paris with Ellinor Ward, who afterwards became Mrs. Vibert. She lived abroad, and I never saw her after we parted in Paris. Gerard met her, I think, at Naples."

That period had been the only breath of free life which had ever come to Aunt Anne. Not, indeed, during the school time, but during the four vacations she had spent with Mdme. Corsand. It had made little permanent impression, but there was an indescribable fragrance about the recollection of that time. It alters nothing that we place a scent-bag somewhere about our drawers or boxes, but whenever we open the repository in which it is, a sweetness is wafted to us.

M. Corsand concentrated in his own person all the pleasure of these recollections. He had an influence over Miss Clayre in virtue of these memories which no one else had. Not that she

had ever been in love with him. She was quite innocent of that passion ; but she had liked him, and that unimpassioned feeling had never died away. Something of her youth returned to her when she saw him.

He, on his part, had never much noticed the quiet inanimate girl who, with Ellinor Ward, used to come to his mother's house. He was good-natured to her, as it was in his nature to be to all, and once or twice, when his gay comrades had teased or ridiculed her, had protected and defended her. But for years she had not been in his thoughts. About ten years previous to this visit he had been sent on a scientific mission to England, and had met her, and they had renewed their acquaintance. She had already attained the gelid monotony of her spinster independence, and he had visited her occasionally.

"Do you think Ivy resembles what I was at her age?"

"No. She is blonde, certainly. All you English nearly can boast that hair and skin, but the features are different."

"She is much taller and stouter, certainly."

Ivy was quite silent. She felt she could only say one word—speak one name. Yet how could she do it ?

M. Corsand meanwhile was perusing her face, and marvelling at the agitation which was working

in it. The character of the head was not one to which this agitation seemed usual.

"You were going to a most beautiful part of the country when I met you," said he, addressing Ivy.

"Beautiful!"

"She was going to stay with some persons—hem!" (Miss Anne coughed a little)—"with the family of her sister-in-law."

"At the Ferry? I remember now."

At this moment the entrance of the tea-tray disturbed Miss Clayre, and reminded her that, as M. Corsand would probably partake of that meal, it would require some slight enlargement to make it presentable. She left the room for the purpose.

"I know Cordelia, your sister-in-law," said M. Corsand, rising and taking Ivy's hand.

"Yes. Do you know where she is? I tried to find you out."

Ivy spoke with an emotion that proved to M. Corsand how much she depended on his answer.

"I do not know where she is now, but she wrote to me after she had left the Ferry. She said she would not then give me her address, but that I might write to her to an address she enclosed. I did so, and have heard nothing more. You have been very anxious?"

"So anxious!"

"Do not be so any more. Cordelia knows that if she has need of me, she has only to summon me. A line from her, and I am with her as soon as it is materially possible. Do not be anxious."

"I was so surprised I had not heard from you."

"You, then, are the Signorina of whom Carlo spoke?"

"I gave him a note to you."

"Exactly; and in some scuffle with other boys he lost it. He was inconsolable."

"I went to the school this afternoon on purpose to see him, and he was absent."

"Yes, he had been sent on a message."

Miss Clayre returned, having made her hospitable arrangements, which manifested themselves in the appearance of a small silver salver, with biscuits on it.

"You will have some tea?" she asked.

Ivy looked wistfully for the answer.

"Certainly."

M. Corsand remained for an hour or two longer; and, though he kept up a conversation principally with the elder lady, he was not unmindful of Ivy.

"He watched her, and remarked with surprise the contrast between the aunt and niece. Once or twice he found something of Cordelia in

her remarks and in her opinions. He could trace certain influences which Cordelia had perhaps almost unconsciously exercised over her friend.

"You must allow me to improve my acquaintance with your niece," said he, as he was leaving the room.

Aunt Anne was pleased.

"Certainly; come as often as you can. It will be a great pleasure to both of us."

"I should think a long walk would sometimes be useful to Miss Ivy."

"It certainly would, for she is almost too tall to go out with servants; and I do not find it possible to walk much myself."

M. Corsand took his leave, determined to see more of Ivy. He was very fond of young people; and there existed in this man, strong and stern as he seemed, the tenderest charity; not in the sense only of its more ostensible manifestations as regarded those in money or body need, but in all its more delicate ministrations towards the lonely and isolated in heart and mind. Towards those, whatever might be their worldly position, he was most beneficent. A book lent, an opportunity for a walk given, a few words of advice uttered, how easy they are, and yet what good they bestow, to the neediest paupers of all, those who need spirit-help! He

saw at a glance what an ungenial home was Ivy's, and he also saw what unusual capacities she was gifted with.

"*Elle a le genie de la bonté*," he muttered to himself, as he left the house. "I may be of some comfort to her by directing and suggesting to her all that she would for ever remain in ignorance of with poor Miss Anne;" and that was quite enough to enlist Maurice Corsand's sympathies for Ivy.

CHAPTER IV.

“IVY, I had a letter this morning from Cordelia.” Such was M. Corsand’s first remark to Ivy as they set off together for one of those walks which were now become regular bi-weekly holidays for Ivy. Aunt Anne saw no objection in these walks. She had known M. Corsand for so many years, that she fancied him older than he was ; and his quiet, grave manners gave him quite the look of a Mentor.

“May I see it ?”

“No ; but I will tell you about it. She is well, she is occupied, and she hopes : and, as she says, those are three conditions in which perhaps the greatest amount of actual peace, if not happiness, can be enjoyed. To work and to hope, that is the advice I give to every one. However marred their fate may be, to work, and to hope that their work is an efficient one, will make any fate endurable.”

M. Corsand sighed : perhaps he felt this himself.

“Yes,” said Ivy, “I know that, and I feel that ;

yet I often ask myself why at times I feel so profoundly dispirited; it is not that I require anything..." (M. Corsand was touched with this contentedness, but was silent.) "Aunt Anne is always kind; I have all, I suppose, which other girls have; and even if I am limited in money matters, it does not signify, for I have no occasion to spend money; but what I want is something to do."

"Yes; I understand that."

"Aunt Anne does not see it. She says there are my lessons, my music, my drawing; but either I have less and less taste for them, or there is a different method of teaching and learning than mine."

"Have you ever asked your aunt to allow you to teach in the Sunday Schools?"

"No; for it would be useless. I asked her only to allow me to have a child or two to teach here, and she said ——"

"What?" said M. Corsand, for he saw Ivy paused and laughed.

"They would soil the passage, and Jones would be vexed. So many little things seem to come between me and the things I desire—objections which seem too trivial to name, and yet which bar me from what I seek as effectually as great obstacles. I do not know whether Aunt Anne felt as I do when she was young, but it

seems to me that I could never live as she does. I must *do* something. I think the poor women who make their daughters sweep and clean the house, and cook the dinner, give them more happiness than I can have, for I am of use to no one."

"But, Ivy, there are seasons for all things. This is your seed-time—the harvest-time is to come. But tell me, what are your dreams of the future? what would you like to do?"

"I have thought of many things," said Ivy. "I should like to be with Cordelia to help her, and assist her, and take care of her: that is one of my dreams." (M. Corsand pressed her hand.) "And then, again, I think that is selfish. I pray that Cordelia may not need my help, that she may have the help which belongs to her by right."

Ivy paused, but her companion was silent, and she went on:—

"Then, when I read the biographies of those women who have done so much good in teaching, in nursing, in reforming, I should like to be one of them."

"Yes, it is natural with your disposition, and I can understand your disappointment; but, after all, Ivy, one looks out for duties, when sometimes they may be feasible very near home. We must learn to circumscribe our efforts. It is

better to do little, than do nothing because we cannot do all we want. The great thing is to be ready. A call may come, and find us unprepared, when we have been bemoaning ourselves for want of occupation up to the very moment it has come. You talk of teaching; do you know how to teach? Every one has certain aspirations, but the difference between man and man is the way we confront the realisation of those aspirations. By the bye," he added, "I can help you to one pupil, I think, and I will engage for him to your aunt that he shall not be troublesome to Jones. That Italian boy Carlo is very anxious to learn, and there are some difficulties about the Ragged School, for his attendance is very uncertain."

"I shall be so glad. I liked his face; it was intelligent, but not cunning."

"He is not a bad boy. I am acquainted with some of his family. In the troubles of '48 they fell into bad repute, for two of his brothers were killed at Curtatone, and his father was badly wounded. Since then he died, and the mother has scarcely been able to maintain her family. They are Lucchese, and this boy accompanied his uncle to England, where they hoped to make a little money by selling plaster images. His antecedents brought him under the notice of some of the Italian patriots, and they have employed him



occasionally ; but they are necessarily obliged to be cautious and sparing in their charities. His great ambition is to know how to read and write. He has a dim notion that he may serve his country one day more effectively if he has a little education."

"Poor fellow !"

"He told me the other day, 'I can die, of course, like my brothers, if the time and opportunity come, and my body may feed a ball just as well when I stand in the breach, whether I can read or not ; but if there are no more battles, I may learn to be useful in other ways, if I know *qualche cosa*.'"

"If you can persuade Aunt Anne, how glad I shall be !"

Her companion smiled at her vehemence.

"I will help you if I can."

Aunt Anne thought it a whim, but supposed that between the cessation of doll-playing and the entrance into the world of balls, girls required certain amusements and playthings of a more serious kind than in their childhood. On the footing of a new toy, Carlo was admitted three times a week for an hour, whenever he could be spared.

The rough lad, who could not get rid of a certain air of lawlessness and dirt, though he was not actually either dirty or disorderly, was

delighted. In truth, he taught almost as much as he learned. He would tell Ivy about his beautiful country, and about the "*tedeschi, questa canaglia*," and some of his legends were terrible.

But, talkative as he was, Carlo possessed the peculiar reticence which distinguishes Italians. With great frankness and apparent impulsiveness, there have been masters of dissimulation among them, and the exigencies of their bad governments have forced them into all kinds of secret societies and organisations, which make silence on certain subjects part of their religion. You may live among them for years, and never guess the workings all round you, till the sudden fire of a great occasion calls out the hidden writing.

The growth of heart and mind which followed this friendship with M. Corsand was extraordinary. Ivy expanded; there was a look about her which used to lead Aunt Anne to exclaim, "That girl is growing quite handsome — how I wish she had a little manner." And even the saturnine Jones would whisper to her mistress, that Miss Ivy would soon be as handsome as Master Gerard."

Jones's idea of perfection in the human shape had always been Master Gerard.

Sir Arthur himself having called on his sister, when Ivy was sitting in the drawing-room, was struck by her appearance, and congratulated



himself that he had never asked her down to Clayre Court, for, as he said to his wife when he got home, "That boy Norton who was with me never took his eyes off her, and blushed, and stammered when she spoke to him like a perfect fool; yet, no sooner were we out of the house than he said, 'I wish Cousin Ivy was going into the country with us.' I am thankful," said Sir Arthur, "that next week he is going abroad."

It would have been difficult to say precisely in what the charm consisted. She was tall, finely made, and singularly easy in her gestures and carriage, but there was no wonderful beauty like Cordelia's to seize the eye at once.

Look at her as she sits with her eyes bending down over her book: you catch her profile, and the young, blooming cheek, but the features are not particularly regular. The nose is quite an undetermined kind of nose, the hair is thick and bright, and the skin rosy and healthy, but the mouth is large, the face somewhat thin, and the jaws, in consequence, are rather strongly developed for so young a girl. If, however, the book is put down, and Ivy looks at you in the face, you are charmed at once. The expression is so candid, so intelligent, so good — good in its deepest, widest sense,—so much can be hoped from, so much can be trusted to, one who wears that look. Transparent, yet deep; kind, yet firm.

Could Ivy have been quite at her ease about Cordelia, she would have considered this the happiest time of her life. There was still anxiety about her, and, moreover, she had had an answer from her brother, both to her first rapturous letter, written from the Ferry, and from the second, after she had returned to town.

To the first he answered briefly and coldly. "Cordelia's beauty is very great, and she possesses, undoubtedly, great fascination of manner, yet, my dear Ivy, I like you so much as you are, that I do not wish to see your simplicity changed in the least. Be sure there are qualities all men value much more than beauty, a warm and womanly heart, for instance. No beauty can atone or compensate for pride, and heartlessness, and unforgiving resentment."

The next letter was worse still. He had heard that Cordelia had left her home, and had not given any indications of her new abode, or of her future plans. To Ivy's hint, that it was possible (she had written before she had met with M. Corsand) Cordelia might intend joining him, he had answered, most scornfully, "that it was impossible. A woman of genius, my dear sister, never acts according to the dictates of simple duty or affection. She requires an *éclat* in all she does; and what inducement can a humble home and drudging husband offer to such? I

hope Cordelia will be happy in her present position, whatever it may be. The gulf between us could scarcely be wider than it is, but it is less likely than ever to be bridged over now. Very little more of good or ill can happen to me in this life; but, should I not be a victim to fever, or to some stray rebel shot, I look forward, my dear Ivy, one day to set up my staff with you in England, and we two will live for each other. After all, the only ties that *never* disappoint one are those of blood."

Gerard evidently was very unhappy, and the bitterness he expressed towards his wife was most painful to Ivy.

Still, with her naturally elastic temperament, she trusted that the day would come when this wrong would be made right. Once let Gerard return to England, and Ivy would soon uproot all these prejudices, and alienations, and indoctrinate him with her opinions about Cordelia. She regretted that this was the one subject on which no communication could take place with her new friend. In the quarrel between Gerard and his wife, she suspected, from what Cordelia had told her, that M. Corsand had a part—but how? She could only be silent, and wait. At the time of the marriage M. Corsand was certainly at Naples, and on terms of intimacy with Mrs. Vibert, but that gave no clue.

M. Corsand was untiring in his praises of Cordelia.

"I look upon her as my daughter, my eldest daughter," he added, kindly; "you are my youngest. I was attracted to her by her beauty, her genius, and her utter unconsciousness of both. She has all the qualities of a great actress,—great sensibility, great imitativeness, and the most lightning quickness of perception."

"You have seen her act, then?"

"Yes; and I sometimes wish that she had confined herself to acting, but her voice was too beautiful to be lost. Still in lyric pieces there will be less scope for her great dramatic powers."

"Do you think she will act again?" Ivy asked, in a whisper, for the bare question was sacrilege in Aunt Anne's little drawing-room.

"Certainly, I am sure she is working her way to Italy, to study there previous to her trying to get some engagement. Cordelia would be happy in a home, a genial home, for she has no love of display; but it is the need of gifts like hers to assert themselves."

"But do you really think marriage is a drawback to a female artist?"

"The question is a subtle one to decide. A great female artist said to me once, and it seems to me that her remark contains some truth: 'A single life is necessary to perform a great

work, especially for a woman.' To the virgins alone, was given the charge of the sacred fire. Balzac has a sentence which is sublime on that subject."

"But one would have a wider range of experience if married, and that would develop the heart and mind more fully."

"With genius insight takes the place of experience. We shall see how Cordelia succeeds."

"How hard it must be to feel that all belonging to her disapprove of what she is doing! Mr. Ashley has the greatest prejudice against the stage. As to Aunt Anne, she would never recover it if she thought any one belonging to her was an actress or singer."

M. Corsand smiled. "Poor Aunt Anne! The world is moulding itself into a different shape from what it was in her youth. It is a delusion to believe that because we move all moves with us, but it is a still more fatal mental blindness to think we can stop when everything moves around us. If we do stop, we are cut off at once from life and must be content to vegetate in a kind of living death."

M. Corsand could not help thinking on his way home how curiously, in spite of all the restraint and repression and grey monotony of the life I have thus minutely detailed, Ivy's soul struggled onwards to the light. Cordelia's more

prodigal but less robust nature would have irrevocably suffered under it. But Ivy was hardier ; and thus learning to forego aspiration, and to be patient under disappointment, her pure and gentle girlhood was prepared to meet the sordid and unpicturesque trials which awaited her.

CHAPTER V.

CARLO had told M. Corsand that he had seen Ivy at the Ferry, when he had been sent with a letter to a Madame Cordelie—he forgot the other name. He described Ivy's enjoyment of the seashore, and then the accident, though that, he said, he had not seen, but it had caused her to faint. And then he had found the bella Signorina, tutta bianca, bianca come un giglio, on the ground, and the poor foot so hurt. He said he was so glad to have been of some little use to her, for she was so good ; she had promised to deliver the letter, and had given him money besides.

"Who gave you the letter?" asked M. Corsand.

"It was sent to my uncle, who told me to take it and bring back the answer. My expenses were paid. I think my uncle said it was from the Princess. He still sees her, and she employs him."

"But you did not wait?"

"No ; the answer was to be sent."

"I do not think there will be any more letters, as the lady to whom they were addressed is not

in England. But now listen attentively, Carlo. Madame Cordelie Clayre—remember that name, Clayre . . .”

“ Si, Signor.”

“ Remember, that if in Italy you should ever meet with that lady (she is Miss Ivy’s sister-in-law), and you can serve her, you are to do so, for my sake and Miss Ivy’s.”

“ Si, Illustrissimo.”

“ You sometimes say you are grateful to me ? ”

Carlo’s gesture was most expressive of the most reverent affection.

“ Well, you cannot prove it more than by serving that lady. You are going to Florence, and she is there ; so it is not impossible for you to meet. Remember, even a poor lad like you can sometimes be of service to others.”

Carlo vowed not to forget Madame Cordelie Clayre.

But, besides his gratitude to M. Corsand, Carlo’s adoration of Ivy was something like that of a monk’s for some favourite Madonna. He would fix his large brown eyes on her with that expression which Scott speaks of in Rob Roy’s Highland page: a what shall I do for you—where shall I go for you—expression.

In some wonderful way, he always managed to bring her a little nosegay. How he got it was a mystery. Ivy would have been touched could

she have known the walks, the gropings about nursery gardens, and the strange devices by which he managed to obtain a flower here, a bud there, a bit of fern, or some rare grass—but the little glass in her room was never empty.

Aunt Anne did not like flowers in a room. The leaves dropped about and made a mess.

As the autumn passed into the winter and flowers became an impossibility, Carlo would carve some little trifle and bring it. He had great ingenuity and great taste. He even won Aunt Anne's favour by presenting her with a little bookmarker, made of some pretty wood, and cut tastefully. She immediately took out a shilling and told Ivy to give it to him, but Ivy had more consideration. She kept the shilling for a little while and, adding some money of her own, bought him a cap and neck handkerchief, which she told him was her aunt's present.

The lad was enchanted. He told Ivy, confidentially, that he would have liked the handkerchief better if it had been of the three national colours, but Ivy explained to him that that mixture was not likely to wear well in London fogs and smoke, and he acquiesced.

He could now read his native language with facility, and could write in large characters, but legibly enough, and had even commenced reading English. He had just mastered the difficulties

of words of one syllable, when he came one evening with an air of utter misery, and, to Ivy's astonishment, when she questioned him as to what was the matter, burst into tears.

He did not seem ashamed of these. That is one of the distinctions between that race and the Anglo-Saxon. They have no *mauvaise honte* about their emotions. After he had a little recovered himself he told her he was going away. The uncle who had come to England with him had sold all his stock and was returning to Lucca. He could not stop in England.

"Would not M. Corsand help you?"

"Yes; he had offered to apprentice him to any trade for which he showed an aptitude. But, Signorina, I feel I had better go back. Any day they may want us—I had better be on the spot."

"They?"

"I nostri—here I can do a little, but any one can do the same; but there every additional one makes a difference. If not, I shall take some service and make some money."

"I shall be so sorry to say good-bye to you, Carlo."

"And I—what do you think? but that is not all—oh, Signorina, my heart is broken"—and he began crying again—"to leave you, M. Corsand, and Susie."

"Susie!" and Ivy looked amazed.

"Ah! si. I love her with all my heart: she loves me."

"Loves!"

Ivy was absolutely speechless. This boy of about her own age had entered, then, that world which seemed utterly far off from herself, and about which her young imagination had never troubled itself at all, for it seemed to belong to the experience of others older, ripier than herself.

"Susie will be one day my wife; we have promised to love each other and be faithful to each other, and we shall marry when we can."

"Who is she?"

"She lives in the same house as we do, with her mother. Her mother is a servant, a day servant; and Susie works in the daytime, and sings in one of the choruses at the theatre."

"Poor girl!"

"She works so hard—they are very, very poor; but in my country with what they earn we could live, oh! so well. I was going to ask the Signorina if she would be so good as sometimes—I do not dare to ask it—"

"Anything I can do, Carlo, for you I will do with pleasure."

"If you would go to see Susie—do I ask too

much?" said Carlo, as he saw the blank look which came over Ivy's face.

"No,—at first I wondered how I should do so. But perhaps M. Corsand will take me."

"Sicuro," said Carlo, who was delighted. "I shall go away happier if I think my Susie has a friend. I have done what I could do, but without me she has no one—for her mother is out all day, and sometimes drinks. She is a good woman, but she is often very tired, and—and—"

"I shall not be able to do much, but I will do all I can. When do you go?"

"To-morrow."

"How sorry I am: but how sudden it is."

"Yes; my uncle never told me till last night. He is a man of few words; and, perhaps, who knows, he may have received the order only that day."

"The order! Who gives him the order to go?"

Carlo turned a little pale, and then stammered, "I said wrong, Signorina. Do not think of that. He only made up his mind to go."

Ivy gave a parting present to her protégé, and, with a really grieved heart, saw him leave her.

While she looked out of the dining-room window M. Corsand arrived, and, after sitting a little while with her aunt, proposed taking her for her usual walk.

When they got out she told him of Carlo's

departure, and of her regret that the lessons were finished.

"Carlo is a very good fellow," said M. Corsand; "there is a sweetness of temper, and at the same time a spirit about him which is rarely met with."

"He was miserable at the idea of going. But what do you think?" said Ivy, believing her friend would share her surprise, "he actually told me—that boy, who is only one year older than I am, I believe—that he was in love, and engaged to a girl, whom he asked me to go and see."

"Poor fellow!"

"But is it possible, at that age to be in love?" and Ivy's innocent eyes widened with surprise.

M. Corsand laughed. "Quite possible: you must remember the poor are always older than the rich. While young ladies like you are tended as children, the lower classes at the same age have already commenced their experience of life. They are in the thick of the struggle, which you only see far off as yet."

"Let us go and see her."

"Certainly. You said she lived where his uncle does. I have something to do in that direction."

They went, and M. Corsand piloted Ivy in the direction of some of those back streets not far from Leicester Square, which harbour the

greater number of the colony of foreigners who reside in London.

A wretched house in a dark alley was at last reached; and, up a number of filthy stairs, they stopped at a door which M. Corsand recognised. He asked Ivy to wait one minute, and went in.

It was a small garret, and on the bed—there was no chair—Carlo's uncle was seated, mending some portion of his dress, while strewed about in every direction were tokens of approaching departure.

M. Corsand spoke in a low voice to him, and in Italian, and gave him some money, which Ivy could see was immediately consigned to a pocket-book; and she could see that the rude stitching on which the man was employed had reference to the preparing a pocket in his waistcoat as a receptacle for this pocket-book. There were both gold and silver pieces in it. He was a swarthy dark-looking man, whose face was one mass of lines and wrinkles, and was never for a second in a state of repose. He was naturally nervous, poor fellow: for the whole of his worldly means was in that book.

M. Corsand came out and said he had asked about Susie, and that the uncle had contented himself with shrugging his shoulders. He said the girl was well enough, but had no "dote;" and Carlo, of course, had not a *quattrino di suo*; but

they were young and could wait, and it did not signify.

They descended the stairs ; but, instead of going out at the door, a sudden turning brought them to a flight of stairs which seemed to go into the bowels of the earth.

They descended, and knocking at a little cellar-like door, were admitted. But even before they had reached the spot, they had been guided to it by a fresh voice running up and down a scale with great sweetness and clearness. They entered, and seated by a table, on which was some work, at which her nimble fingers were very busy, sat Susie. Carlo stood near her.

Susie was a pale girl, bleached from want of air and exercise into a paleness not natural to her. She had brown hair and eyes, but was not pretty. She looked neat and clean in her dress.

The little underground back kitchen—for it was nothing more—was as clean as the deeply-ingrained dirt left by preceding lodgers allowed it. There was no fire ; a sort of press concealed the bed ; there were but two straw chairs, and one was broken. Susie sat on a box. On the table, however, was a seedy-looking mignonette in a pot, and beside it a little plaster cast of Garibaldi. Susan's work-basket was of wood, neatly carved, and in it was a tiny tri-coloured cockade. These were all gifts from Carlo. Poor

as they were, they gave a character to the poor little room. There was love, and industry, and aspiration in it; the loftiest saloon could not be tenanted by spirits more holy.

"Oh, Signorina," said Carlo, "how good you are!" as they entered; and Susie, who looked older than he was, rose, with a blush, and offered her a chair, the only unbroken one in the room. Ivy thanked her, and told her they had come to see her, in compliance with Carlo's request. Could they be of any use to her?

She sighed and shook her head. Just then she had work.

It was an interesting sight to see these poor children, to whom love had made a Paradise of that sordid spot.

When M. Corsand said something to Carlo about the imprudence of such an engagement, he answered, with great energy,—

"What could we do? We were so poor, so hard-worked, so unhappy. If we had not loved each other, what should we have done? We have worked harder ever since; have we not Susie?"

Susie blushed deeper and smiled.

It was evident that Susie was as deep in the fault as Carlo.

"You must let me know if I can do anything for you. I will write my address for you."



"And I will give you my card too," said M. Corsand. "Supposing I am not in London, you can send up that card to Miss Clayre."

M. Corsand then took Carlo aside, and spoke to him, and asked him what he was going to do in Italy.

When they left, Ivy observed that M. Corsand put the remains of his purse into Susie's hand.

As they walked home, Ivy was very silent.

"What are you thinking of, *mon enfant*?" That was M. Corsand's pet name for Ivy.

"How strange it is, that while I was teaching Carlo, and considering him a mere boy, he was old enough to think of love and marriage. In all the novels I have read, even if people are young in years, they seem mature in thought and feeling; but these two, Carlo and Susie, are mere children, especially Carlo."

"Love is of no age, Ivy: it is always young, and always mature. These two young, thoughtless creatures, have entered the charmed circle unconsciously; but once in it, they belong to it as entirely as if their entrance had been delayed for years. It is a piteous thing when one reflects on the separation they are to endure, and all the fatal chances against Carlo's life; but up to this time it has been a mutual protection and shield."

"When do you think Carlo will return?"

"It is quite uncertain. He goes with his uncle,

and events are preparing which may —— But it is no use speaking of these things: try not to lose sight of Susie."

"I will speak to Aunt Anne about it. Or will you?"

"I will."

Carlo had finally told M. Corsand that his uncle had informed him that when they reached Italy he (Carlo) must try and find some situation as a servant of some kind; for that in the house at Lucca there were already too many mouths to feed.

"Shall you like that?"

"Oh, yes. I have written down some names where I can apply; and I am very anxious to get money and come back."

"Here is an address which will find me if you send me a line (you know you can write now) to this address in Paris. Sooner or later it will be sure to find me; and do not forget the name of Clayre."

Carlo thanked his protector, and renewed his promise. Fidelity and gratitude were dog-like in Carlo. He would have died to serve M. Corsand. He had not only himself received kindness from him, but he had seen others saved from want, misery, illness, by the same hand.

M. Corsand's position as the sole trustee of the large fortune left by Mrs. Vibert for charitable

purposes, gave him an opportunity of searching for those who really needed help, and of dispensing these vast resources not only *en masse* to institutions (though he carefully visited these in all countries, and endowed them with a due proportion of this wealth), but to single and isolated cases in which a small sum given at a moment of need often saved life, honour, and the soul itself.

CHAPTER VI.

“M. CORSAND has been here this morning ; and he tells me he is obliged to leave London immediately,” said Aunt Anne to Ivy, about a week after the above conversation.

Ivy was motionless.

“He will return when he has finished some business, and take leave of you. I am so sorry he is going.”

Ivy was more than sorry, but she was quite silent. It seemed ever her fate to enter upon a new acquaintance—or friendship—to enjoy it for awhile, and then to have it taken from her.

Twice within the last six months had her affections clung round one every way fit to be a support and guide to her, and twice had the prop been rent away.

And what had she to fall back upon ?

When M. Corsand came, he was touched by the mute but deep sorrow in her face. He was fond of her, hoped much from her. And to a life like his, in which he now allowed himself no tie except to duty, it was inexpressibly

sweet to befriend and assist this lonely, young existence.

"How sudden!" said Ivy.

"Yes. When I went home that evening, I found a letter which obliges me to leave. You must write to me, Ivy. I will leave you an address which will always find me. I stay at Southampton some days before I leave England. You must promise me to continue all the studies we have commenced together; remember this is seed-time."

"And Cordelia?" whispered Ivy.

"Anything I can impart to you, I will."

They parted. Ivy leaned out of the window to watch his quick, firm step down the street. Amidst the passers-by he was so easily distinguished. None had that bearing—none walked with so much spirit and elasticity.

He turned round his head once, and Ivy saw once more that dark intelligent face, which had always looked so kindly upon her, and with which was connected all the aspiration and purpose of her life.

Had Ivy been the least romantic, had M. Corsand's head and heart been less absorbed in stirring and absorbing matters, they were in the position to fall in love with each other. The disparity of years would have given a piquancy and a charm; but they neither of them dreamed of such a thing. A friendship under such circum-

stances is rarer, but infinitely sweeter. The difference of sex gave a deference in manner which compensated for the superiority of age on the part of the man. The young plant turned by a law of its nature towards the light, and the light shone on it unsparingly and gladly. Maurice Corsand was one of those rare natures who unite strong and decided principles to great sweetness and suavity of disposition. He might be compared to a Gothic cathedral. At first the lines and proportions are so grand, the shadows are so majestic, the whole edifice is upborne to Heaven with such lofty directness of appeal, that one thinks of nothing else ; but afterwards, the lovely sculpture, the beautiful carvings, so graceful and playful, and prodigal of beauty, attract the eye, and one is sometimes absorbed in the contemplation of these, to the omission of the building itself.

Ivy sat down, with an aching heart, to reflect on all her loss. It seems so difficult to take up one's life again after a parting which leaves mind, heart, and soul bereaved. She looked so pale that her aunt noticed it.

"Do not fret after our kind friend, Ivy," said Aunt Anne kindly ; "he will come back some day, I suppose? "

Aunt Anne fortunately was too fettered by a certain formula of probabilities to suspect her niece of

anything beyond regret at losing her companion in her walks. A more suspicious mind might have thought it possible that the attachment was of a deeper and more peculiar nature, but she was innocent as a child in such matters.

Love with Aunt Anne was that feeling of preference a young lady felt for a man *after* he had proposed to her, and she, with the full consent of her parents, had accepted him. Prospectively, love looked forward to trousseau, settlements, or a marriage-breakfast; retrospectively, to balls, dinner-parties, operas, a pressure of the hand, and a neatly-worded note with a request to speak to parents. Without these preliminaries and these consequences, love existed not.

Ivy smiled at her aunt's effort at consolation; and, at all events, it so far had its effect, that she roused herself while she was with her in the drawing-room. When she got into her room at night, and was left alone, she made up for her self-control. She got up and went to the window, and looking at the narrow space of starry sky perceptible above the roofs and chimney-pots, which closed round on every side, uttered, almost audibly, the exclamation, "What shall I do?"

How many young hearts have asked the same! The entire vacuity of a girl's life, under ordinary circumstances, is something surprising. When

there are brothers or sisters to tease or help, as the case may be, there is something called out of one—some discipline to be exercised—some interest to be awakened; but a girl who is so situated as to have none of these claims on her time or attention is to be deeply pitied. A girl shut up in London with a person like Aunt Anne; a girl full of generous, warm thoughts and impulses, active, energetic, enterprising; it was a living death.

Ivy breakfasted early, and alone. She studied French or Italian, or practised on the piano till noon, when her aunt came down. Then she read her the newspaper, or some book of travels of the most twaddling description till luncheon. After that meal, Ivy worked,—her aunt insisted upon that,—and then she went out for a walk with the servant; then it was usual to sit in the dusk till dinner time, six o'clock in summer or five in winter, and then a little reading or work till tea, and after tea till ten o'clock. And thus life had been going on from the time Ivy left school, and would go on till she was presented. Then she would be taken to balls, during the season, and be yet more restricted as to freedom of all kinds, and when the season was over the same dreary life would recommence.

Aunt Anne's acquaintances belonged chiefly to persons of her own standing in years and posi-

tion in life. They were totally uninteresting to Ivy. They came seldom, and took little notice of her. Some of the most benevolent would ask her to spend a day with them, but there were difficulties as to sending her and bringing her home, which were obstacles even as regards this change. Ivy had been gifted with an elasticity of temperament, and powers of enjoyment which had hitherto resisted all these depressing elements in her fate. No crumb of pleasure was passed by. She had made the most of the smallest, but there were additional needs in her being lately, which required increase of aliment. A strong desire had been roused in her to sit no longer with arms folded, a spectator of life, but to enter on it herself, earn her own portion in it. That seemed so clear a duty. If it were not for her, Aunt Anne might allow herself many more comforts. Perhaps when she had done that, the larger region of doing good to others, to enroll herself among that band of workers who were beginning to make themselves felt, wherever the great questions of humanity were stirring, might be reached.

But still, *to do* was the question. To use this strength, this health, this power that she felt within her, to some purpose. Not to live on in the effete state of ordinary young ladyism. Ivy was not *blasée*; she liked dancing for dancing's

sake, she enjoyed theatres, she had that sense of pleasure, mere pleasure, which bubbles up in veins of seventeen ; but her eyes had been spirit-touched, she had had a glimpse of the beautiful world of art, she had touched, with M. Corsand's hand, that other world of benevolence which had even greater attractions for her disposition. How earnestly she desired to live, live, in her sense of that word. Not the waking sleep to which she seemed condemned. How many deep and solemn questions were agitated by that young heart on this wakeful night ! The vigil of arms of the squires of old was less rife in resolution and hope.

Buoyant, however, as Ivy was by disposition, she could not conceal from herself what difficulties were in her plans. Her aunt was so gentle, but so impracticable. What were her own resources ? Five pounds a quarter for the purchase of gloves, shoes, ribbons, collars, sleeves, writing-paper, postage : and besides these, little presents and charities had to be screwed out of this fund. Miss Clayre insisted on Jouvin gloves and Melnotte bottines. It was the only distinction she observed which remained to a lady to be irreproachably *gantée* and *chaussée*. These were all things she could not make herself ; she could not hope to economise in these. She racked her brains, but no device would present itself by which the very first steps which lead to indepen-

dence could be attained. She turned it round and round in her mind, but there was no simple method at hand by which Ivy Clayre could obtain one shilling. Her thoughts turned to authorship, that most fallacious promise to the young. But she stopped at once. She knew she had not the faculty for authorship. Ivy had the courage to face the truth. She had something to say, but she knew not how to say it. What was more, she felt uncertain that she grasped any idea so strongly or so determinately as to reproduce it clearly. Vague, intangible visions floated before her imagination, but not one had looked into her eyes and convinced her that it was a real presence. To be efficacious, that sacrament requires a burning faith—a faith in *itself*, and a faith in *ourselves*. Ivy felt she had not either, as yet.

There was only one way left. She could teach, that she knew. Could not she devote a few hours every day to teaching? She could teach French, Italian, perhaps English (Ivy was less sure of the last), as well, certainly, as she had been taught herself.

With this idea in her mind, as the first step towards the desired independence, she went to bed, wondering if, by the time she again saw M. Corsand, she should have achieved this desired independence.

The next morning, as soon as Aunt Anne was down, and after she had read aloud such parts of the newspaper as usually pleased her, she put it down and began.

"Aunt Anne, I have been thinking I cost you a great deal of money."

Aunt Anne looked up, mildly. "Certainly, Ivy, all girls do; though I do think you wear out your dresses faster than I did."

"I have been thinking that I should like in some way—I will tell you how afterwards—I should like to earn a little money."

"What are you saying, Ivy? I do not understand you; you talk so fast, and you are so flushed. I wish you would learn to speak gently, with a little more manner."

"I should like to earn some money—I could teach."

"Do, Ivy, talk distinctly; I do not hear a word."

"Aunt Anne, I feel ashamed of being a burden to you any longer."

"My dear Ivy, you are not a burden; you are my niece."

"I know; but if it were not for me, you could have a great many more comforts; do let me earn some money."

"Earn money!" Aunt Anne put down her crochet in speechless indignation.

"Yes, I could teach; there are often advertisements in the papers,—people who want a governess for a few hours; they do not earn much, but it would be something to begin upon, and I could get a better salary when I was older."

"Salary! Ivy, are you mad?"

"No, dear aunt, I have thought of this a long time; and ever since I found how well I succeeded with Carlo, I think I could really teach children."

"Ivy," said Aunt Anne, in a more agitated voice than she had ever heard, "I do not know in the least what you mean, or what you are talking about—you seem to me raving."

"But, dear aunt, so many girls of my age do the same thing, and support themselves entirely."

"I never could have believed it," ejaculated Miss Conyers to herself; "her head has been turned at that place in the country. She has been very odd ever since she returned, but I had hoped M. Corsand had given her good advice." Aunt Anne sighed most piteously.

"I did not mean to make you angry," said Ivy, but I thought ——"

"Ivy," said Aunt Anne, in her coldest and most displeased tone, "do not let me hear you speak in this odd way. Remember your name is Clayre, and respect those who bear it also."

"But, aunt ——"

"I am not well enough to enter into these discussions. If you persist in them, I must request you to remain in your room till the whim is over. In my young days, girls relied on the fondness and care of those they were with; their part was to obey. If such a dreadful misfortune were to happen, that you should be obliged to work for your own support, I know no one who understands the value of money less, and is more inclined to launch out into foolish extravagance. Will you bring that book we were reading—those 'Travels in Madagascar.' Never let Sir Arthur know you had such folly in your head."

Poor Ivy! Thus succeeded her first attempt at independence. She had put on her armour for an encounter with the warfare of the real world, and a windmill had stopped her with a vengeance. The obstacle was mere wind, but wind, moved by so impenetrable a machine, that she was baffled at once.

While her lips went on with the words she was reading, her mind was occupied busily on what had passed. "Would it be such a dreadful misfortune to be obliged to earn her own livelihood?" She thought with a thrill that it would be happiness itself, and was amazed at the difference between herself and her aunt on all these points.

CHAPTER VII.



ON the next evening, as Ivy again addressed herself to the task of thinking "what she should do," her thoughts turned to Gerard. She had not heard from him for some time. In her dreams, before he was married, she had often thought of spending her life with him, and of their both remaining single and devoted to each other. This had passed away, and not even his allusion to it in his last letter had revived the idea. She felt that he belonged to Cordelia, and she was assured within herself, as regarded the clouds between them, that they would blow over. If she ever should live with Gerard, it would be with both the husband and wife. She could not help smiling, hurt and disappointed as she had been, at Aunt Anne's indignation at her proposal. If she had offered to commit some crime, the proposal could not have been treated with more horror. The criminality of earning one's own bread, seemed the profoundest degradation in the circle to which she belonged. Ivy's thoughts took a wide range on this reflection, and it was

happy for Aunt Anne that she was spared them. Then, again, pressed on her the utter nullity and void of her life. She had not the power of aiding a single human being under any of the heavy burdens and oppressions that weighed all round. As long as she confined herself to the daily round, nothing was expected of her but to allow herself to be fed and clothed.

Ivy would have willingly changed places with the poorest girl who earned her shilling a day by needlework, so as to acquire that sense of being which is so inextricably bound up in some minds with doing, rather than be the non-entity she called herself.

The next day there was quite a cloud on Aunt Anne's brow. She said little, but she evidently had been deeply shocked. Ivy's affectionate heart smote her: instead of helping her, she had evidently added to her cares.

With characteristic simplicity, Aunt Anne had taken it into her head that Ivy could not be well. Such wild talk savoured of feverishness. She was very anxious about her. She had written a note to Sir Arthur before she was down; he was in town for a few days; she would not wait for the Sunday when she should dine with him, but asked him to come to her and consult with him about Ivy. Meanwhile, perhaps the air would do her good; and she had told Bessie to take a long

walk in the Regent's Park with her niece. "Miss Ivy does not seem well," she said, "perhaps the fresh air will do her good."

Accordingly, at three o'clock on a dull November day, Ivy went to the Regent's Park for a long constitutional walk.

Though there is something very pleasant to think of these large tracts of land devoted in London to the exercise and health of the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods in which they are, it must be confessed that they present at times the most melancholy spectacle under the sun.

The Regent's Park especially, with its funereal-looking houses, blackened by the damp and cold—its melancholy canals and dripping trees, scarcely perceptible through the fog which hangs over them—looks a region of misery. On certain days it invites to suicide.

Ivy looked at the dim stretch before her, and drew her shawl closer round her with a shiver. Then, with that habit which young and ardent temperaments have of seeing omens and resemblances of their fate in all the inanimate objects they meet with, she thought, so colourless, so dull, so cold was her life: no meaning in it, no beauty. It was not poor or sordid, but it had no genuineness and no freedom. Bessie's was a more favoured lot.

"Do you know, Bessie, I sometimes wish I was a servant."

"Lor, Miss!"

"Yes; it must be so pleasant to know one can earn money and spend it."

"Without being beholden to any one. Lor, so it is, Miss! I never thinks of that," interrupted the energetic Bessie; "but, for all that, I should like to be a lady."

"Why?"

"To wear nice clothes, and to lie in bed a morning, Miss. Jones do so hurry one, Miss; it's always drive, drive with her."

"If you were like me, for instance, Bessie?"

"Sure, Miss—yes, *that* I should. Jones says when the time comes for to take you hout, Missus will go to balls with you, Miss. I never danced but once at a Christmas party, but I loves it."

"Can you read, Bessie?"

"Yes, Miss, my Bible and Prayer-book; I can make them out easy, but not other books. I tried once at a track."

"Track?"

"Yes, track as was given me quite promiscuous by a lady. It was called, 'Steps for Sinners,' Jones said, but I saw nothing in it."

"Would you like me to teach you, Bessie?"

"If you *would* be so kind, Miss. But, indeed, I have little time; making up a cap once a week

is all I get through—so many things to mend and see after.”

A thought struck Ivy. “Do you mend my things?”

“Yes, Miss, your stockings and under linen.”

“Well, Bessie, I should like to do that myself, and you will have some more time for yourself; and if you like to spend it in learning to read, I can teach you.”

“Thank you, Miss. But we had better make haste; it is spitting, I think, and we shall have it raining fast by the time we get home.”

As they were emerging from the stillness and seclusion of the Park into the New Road, the attention of both was attracted by a crowd surrounding a placard at the corner of one of the streets. Neither Ivy nor Bessie looked at the date.

They glanced at it mechanically, and Ivy gave a cry of alarm. It contained intelligence of a frightful massacre in the East; and the news was announced in the most appalling manner. Gerard’s regiment, Ivy knew, was stationed near the town named.

Ivy rushed home; and, regardless of the majestic presence of Sir Arthur, told her aunt.

“Is it not dreadful! Where is Gerard’s regiment?” said she to Sir Arthur.

"I do not recollect exactly ; but this is very stale news."

"Oh, Aunt Anne, what will become of Gerard ! Can we not ascertain something ? He has not written for so long."

"Be composed," said Sir Arthur. "I have reason to think his regiment has never been in action yet. What an excitable young lady you are !"

Aunt Anne shook her head with an "I told you so" expression, as she exchanged looks with Sir Arthur.

"Well, I must be off—good bye, Anne ;" and, nodding to Ivy, he was leaving the room ; but she was at the door before him.

"How can I ascertain where Gerard's regiment is ?" she said, in a voice she tried to make calm.

Sir Arthur looked amazed at this pertinacity, but felt rather helpless before it.

"We will see, we will see. I will let you know if I hear anything ; but you have no reason for this excitement, I assure you."

And again Sir Arthur congratulated himself that he had always kept Ivy at a certain distance. She looked most dangerously handsome at that moment, with her eyes sparkling through the tears which were gathering in them, and her flushed cheeks. Fortunately Norton was abroad now.

Ivy sat down for one minute, with her hand

pressed over her eyes. It was a shock, and she had been so depressed before it, that it hurt her more than it would otherwise have done.

She resolved she would write by the next mail, and implore Gerard to be punctual in writing, if only a line, to reassure her.

"We have been thinking," said Aunt Anne, when she saw Ivy rise to go to her own room to take off her cloak and wraps; "but I will wait till you come down again—Sir Arthur has a plan."

Ivy stopped.

"No; I will tell you when you come down again."

When she did so, her aunt commenced:

"It seems to me, Ivy, that you are not well. I do not think you have been well since you returned from that place in the country." (It would have been undignified to remember such a name as the Ferry.) "I have observed it; I think it made you restless and—and odd; and you have even less manner than you had."

"I am quite well, I assure you, dear aunt."

"I cannot think it; so I resolved to consult a little with my brother, and we have both agreed that a change may do you good. He has kindly invited us to Clayre Court for Christmas. I shall not go, it is too cold for me to move about, but you must go; and

there is to be a ball, the usual county ball, sometime during the week or fortnight after Christmas, and you are to go, chaperoned by Lady Clayre."

"But I cannot go now."

"Why not?"

"With these dreadful news—I cannot go among strangers at such a time as this."

"Strangers! they are your own relations."

"I have never seen one of them."

"Ivy, this is too bad; what has come to you?" and Aunt Anne's delicate face flushed with a pained surprise.

"Dear aunt, I will do anything you wish, but only consider."

"I can only consider that Sir Arthur thought it right."

"But he did not know of these news."

"What difference does that make? If you always expect that something has happened to your brother, you will never go out at all. I must manage to get you a ball dress."

Ivy felt that her fate was decided, and that go she must. This was what always hurt her. With her good sense and intelligence, her real strength of character, of which no modesty could make her totally unconscious, she was invariably treated as a child. She was taken here, or sent there, all on the plea of her

own good or her own amusement, but like a puppet, whose strings were drawn by others. Had any extraordinary chance ordered that she should be married the next day, she would then have been left at liberty; but, without the magic circlet on her finger, she was supposed totally incapable of self-guidance in the most trivial matter.

She was yet so thoroughly amiable, that she saw at once that Aunt Anne had been guided by a wish to benefit her, mistaken as it was; and she thought, poor girl! it was unselfish of her aunt to deprive herself again of her. She did not know that these little pebbles which were being thrown into the calm stream of their usual intercourse, were so disagreeable to the indolent Miss Clayre, that she really preferred the unbroken quiet of her solitude. As it was, Ivy rose, and going to her aunt's couch, said affectionately to her:

"Besides, I do not like leaving you alone at Christmas."

"That is of no consequence," said her aunt, who looked a little frightened at this demonstration.

"I really must go, then?"

"Of course."

"It is really hard, when I should like so much best to be here."

Her own words echoed strangely on her ear. A few hours before she had thought, if she could go—at any price, go—leave this vegetating creeping existence, and begin to live somewhere else. Now the wish had been answered, and she hated the bare thought of going. She stooped and kissed her aunt's forehead, and went back to her seat.

In the evening a note was brought from Sir Arthur, to say that his nephew's regiment had not as yet reached the scene of action, but was on its march. It was supposed, however, the insurrection would be put down long before the additional troops reached there.

"You see there is no reason to be anxious,—all is settled by this time; we shall hear from Gerard next month, I dare say."

Ivy was a little more satisfied, but did not feel quite at rest. She had an invincible distrust of Sir Arthur. His wig, his false teeth, a certain *cidevant-jeune-homme* air, were all disagreeable to her, and gave him an expression of falseness which was excessively painful to her. She felt that he rather disliked and was afraid of her; and though she was grateful for his kindness to Gerard, it had been bestowed so grudgingly, so much more out of regard to the name of Clayre than to any real affection for his grandson, that she did not allow her gratitude to take any



undue proportions. She thought she should have liked Norton if he had not been so dreadfully shy, but all the rest of the family were supremely disagreeable to her; and, besides, Norton was abroad. His health had become so delicate, that he had been abroad for some months. Lady Clayre had a greedy, watchful look, as if she was straining every point to make the best of her marriage with a man double her age, and whose large possessions had already an heir. She was a woman of a niggardly spirit, and there was an excuse for the indulgence of this fault. Her own family was poorly provided for, and Sir Arthur had little in his power. He was not able, she said, to do justice (she called it doing justice) to her and his second family, except by the practice of the most rigid economy. They had had a commission to purchase for a wild grandson of Sir Arthur's, who had made a *mésalliance*, which had turned out very badly, the previous year. All these hints and inuendoes were uttered before Ivy, and with a care that she should hear them, which was evident to her quick perceptions, and which gave her a profound contempt for Lady Clayre.

No one was of a less morbid nature than Ivy, but she did feel a bitterness in her heart when she reflected on these things, and a certain loneliness was felt by her. She was one of those

persons who usually are content to love, and who do not question whether they are loved; who are happy if only permitted to live in another life, but who seek no exorbitant sympathy in their own; but she did feel this evening that her own relatives considered her somewhat of a troublesome burden, which was to be passed from one to another, with little care as to her own wishes in the matter, and that her friends were spirited away from her as soon as she had learned to love and lean upon them. How colourless and how grey all seemed around her! Life was very bitter at this moment for poor Ivy. However, her fear of going to Clayre Court was dispelled in a manner she little anticipated.

As she lay awake, she thought she heard the sound of a bell, but it was touched so lightly she imagined it was only her fancy; and gradually the heavy, wearied thoughts began to assume less and less distinctness, and at last she fell fast asleep.

She had not slept half an hour, when she was awoke by a light hand placed on her arm.

"You must get up, please Miss," said Bessie.

CHAPTER VIII.

“WHAT is the matter, Bessie?”

“A man has come with a message from the railroad. We were all asleep, but I heard the bell. I went down and listened, and I heard it again, and then I opened the door. Here it is, Miss.”

Ivy sat up with bewildered eyes. It was a telegraphic despatch.

“Maurice Corsand to Miss Ivy Clayre: Gerard Clayre leaves Southampton by the first morning train, 7.10, badly wounded. Send for Dr. Faile.”

Ivy sprang out of bed.

“Where is the man?”

“I paid him, Miss. He did not need to wait, he said; but, what is the matter?”

“Gerard is coming home, Bessie, badly wounded: we must have the doctor here. Where is ‘Bradshaw?’”

After a search a “Bradshaw” was found. The first train did not arrive till ten minutes to ten. “Fortunately,” Ivy thought, “Aunt Anne will not be up.”

"Bessie, will you tell Anne to have the doctor sent for, and for him to be here by ten o'clock. Do not tell Aunt till she has had her breakfast."

"And where is he to sleep, Miss?"

"He must sleep here, in this room."

"And you, Miss?"

"Any where. Never mind me;" and then Ivy's fortitude gave way and she shed some natural tears.

"Don't take on so, Miss."

"Poor Gerard, he must be very ill to leave now."

She took up the paper, and wondered if she could make out anything from it, but it was in vain. She remembered that M. Corsand had told her he was going to Southampton. Had they met?—and how strange it was that he should be so mixed up with her concerns.

She sent Bessie to bed, and, after some hesitation returned to her own, where she listened with wide open eyes to the march of the hours.

As soon as it was dawn—the late dawn of a November day—she dressed herself, and then waited till the servants were up. She ordered breakfast to be ready, and sat down with beating heart to await the time.

If she thought that her aunt was to remain in ignorance, she had not reflected on the solemn

suggestions in Jones's face. Aunt Anne was the least perceptive person in the world, but even she could not help noticing it as she brought her breakfast to her bedside.

"What is the matter, Jones?"

"Nothing, ma'am."

"Nothing! why do you sigh so?"

"People as hasn't had a wink of sleep."

"Why?"

"Please don't, ma'am; I mustn't tell."

"Ring Jones, please," said Miss Clayre with dignity; "or rather go down stairs and ask Miss Ivy to step up here."

Anne obeyed, and in a few minutes was ushered into the room by Jones, who by this time had become tearful.

"I didn't tell, please, Miss; but you had best do so."

"Come here, Ivy. What is this?" said Miss Clayre, as she crumbled her toast in her tea, without raising her eyes to Ivy's pallid face.

"I got a telegram last night. Oh! aunt, Gerard is dreadfully wounded; he will be here directly."

"Good heavens, Ivy, why was I not told? What is to be done?"

Ivy was now crying unrestrainedly.

"There is nothing to be done—unless you would let me meet him at the train."

"Impossible, at this hour. I cannot spare Bessie, while Jones is occupied with me. Where is he to sleep?" and Miss Clayre muttered to herself—"So tiresome to come in this sudden manner; but he never had any thought."

"I thought my room would do, aunt, and I have sent for Dr. Faile."

Miss Clayre dismissed her niece and began to dress, more flurried, as she termed it, than she had ever been in her life.

Ivy went down to sit in the drawing-room: to start at every cab that went by—to shrink from every ring, to listen to every step.

Yet she was thankful; a fortnight later she would have been at Clayre Court, and then, what would have been done? Now, at least, all was ready, and she was on the spot to nurse her brother.

She almost cried out as she saw by the clock it was ten. The train had arrived.

Eleven passed, and the only interruption was the doctor, who was shown up in the drawing-room.

At half-past eleven a cab drove up slowly to the door. She stood up breathless, but scarcely knew whether to rush out or not. Dr. Faile had heard it, and came down.

The cab door was opened and, borne in the

arms of two men, Gerard Clayre was carried into the house.

He was perfectly insensible, and was at once taken up and laid on Ivy's bed.

Ivy followed. As she reached the door (she had paused one moment, by Dr. Faile's request, to beg Miss Clayre to remain in the drawing-room till he came down), the two men who had carried Gerard in came out.

One was a common man, who touched his cap and went down, the other paused and said, "Ivy, come with me for a minute—Dr. Faile is attending him."

It was M. Corsand.

What a sense of relief Ivy felt.

"Tell me——" she said, she could not say more.

"I went down to Southampton, as I told you, purposing to leave in a few days. Last evening the Indian steamer arrived, with troops, wounded men, &c. Among them was your brother. It was supposed he was dying. He was brought to the same hotel I was staying at. I did what I could. He was perfectly insensible from fever and exhaustion; but finding that, if anything, there was a shade of improvement during the night, I consulted with the surgeon, who said that if he recovered his senses and spoke rationally, and wished to

be brought home, it was best. The moving, if managed with care, would do less harm than remaining alone in the hotel. There is a ball which they cannot extract, and it may be months before he is well, or even able to walk about. We waited, and during the night he did recover his senses. I telegraphed to you immediately. The only words he said were, 'I want to see my sister.' We got the invalid carriage for him and placed him in it, but he has scarcely been conscious these two hours, and fainted in the cab."

Ivy's tears flowed fast. "How shall I thank you? You have saved his life, I see."

"Shall I tell you what you can do for me, Ivy?"

"Yes."

"Do not mention to your brother my name."

"Not mention you?"

"No; be sure I am right. I have no wish that you should conceal from him that I know you; but do not let him imagine he is under any obligation to me for this. You will see, the first time you name me, that he will be sure to tell you never to repeat my name again. He has always disliked me, and I only came with him because literally there was no one else to come, and he could not be sent alone."

"You have a right to any promise you wish

from me ; but I should have so wished to make him understand how much we all owe you."

"Rely on me that I am right." Ivy involuntarily seized his hand and kissed it. There was a certain sweet stateliness about M. Corsand which permitted this. "Shall you let Cordelia know this?"

"No ; it would be torturing her to no purpose. She cannot come here, and she would have to bear all her anxiety alone in a foreign land. I have an impression that your brother will recover, and it is so much pain spared her."

"You are right."

He laid his hand on her head with a fatherly benediction.

"God bless you, *mon enfant*, your affection consoles me for much. I am now going to your aunt to ask the same favour of her, and to insist that those women of yours do not divulge the fact, that the telegram was signed by me, and that I accompanied him here."

Ivy went into the room. Dr. Faile, with Bessie's assistance, had got his patient into bed.

He held up his hand as Ivy came in, to restrain any emotion on Ivy's part. It was unnecessary. Ivy was quite white, and her eyes were heavy, but she did not cry or tremble. She entered softly, and sat by the bedside.

"Perfect quiet, Miss Ivy, is the great thing. He must not be disturbed, but every hour you must wet his lips with a draught which I will send. I will go now and report to Miss Clayre. Those men who brought him up are gone, I think?"

"Yes." Ivy was glad the inquisitive Faile had not recognised M. Corsand.

She sat by the bed, and looked earnestly on the pale face, white as the pillow on which it rested, beside her. Gerard Clayre was pre-eminently handsome. He had the same complexion, the same coloured hair and eyes as Ivy, but the features were regular and finely cut, almost to effeminacy.

In health, his tall and manly proportions took off this impression, but as he lay there, wasted to a shadow, with no perceptible colour in his face, save where the violet-coloured veins intersected and shadowed the temples, his beauty was as delicate and fragile-looking as a girl's. Ivy's heart beat fast as she watched him. Was he so vindictive, so cruel, so heartless, as to hate with so relentless a hate a man like M. Corsand? And Cordelia: what had been his conduct to her?

It was so strange to sit by him and reflect on all that had passed since they had met. As a child and young girl she had thought him

perfection. He had exercised over her the tyranny of an elder brother to his only sister and playmate. To emulate him had been the object of her childish life, in spite of the scoldings which it had brought upon her. As a girl, her few pleasures had been procured by him. He had lent her the books she read, and had even given her some. In those days he was generous, kind, and, if somewhat imperious, affectionate, and tender-hearted. Then there was a lapse. He had gone abroad. He had rarely written — he had married, and then some mysterious catastrophe had occurred. He had returned a changed, embittered, silent man. He had left England, and since his absence had only written a few brief reckless, misanthropical letters. And now this strange alienation from his wife, this enmity to M. Corsand, were as inexplicable as they were grievous.

Ivy thought she saw the trace of sorrow as well as illness on his face. Her whole heart yearned towards him. He would have confidence in her now, surely, and then, she might be the means of reconciling them all.

The draught came, and for two or three hours Ivy obeyed the doctor's orders. She merely stepped down for a minute to tell her aunt that she should remain with him.

Poor Miss Conyers looked distracted with care and anxiety.

"I do not know what we shall do, Ivy," she said, wringing her hands; "the house is quite upset."

"No, dear aunt, there is no reason it should be so. I will sit up-stairs, Bessie and Jones can do just as usual. For the first few nights Dr. Faile says he will send a nurse, but perhaps you would not mind my having a mattress on the floor of his room."

"That is impossible; but you can have a bed in Bessie's room overhead, or rather take her room, and she can sleep with Jones. But I am really quite nervous—so thoughtless, I mean," she corrected herself—"it is so sudden; but he was always headstrong."

Ivy left her, and returned to her post. She fancied his breathing was a little more calm and regular, and when the doctor came he told her she was right.

On the next day towards noon, a slight shiver passed over the hushed face, and with an apparently extreme effort the eyes opened. He looked round with surprise, and at Ivy with doubtful recognition.

"Dearest Gerard, don't you know me? You are at home!"

"Ivy."

"Thank God you know me!" and she immediately administered the cordial which had been kept for this anticipated occasion.

"Thank you dear. How tired I am!" and without another word he sank again into a deep sleep.

This continued for some time. At last youth and a good constitution, and the unutterable care of Ivy, made themselves felt, and about three weeks after Gerard Clayre had been brought into his aunt's house to die, as they all thought, he was lying on a sofa hired for him in the back drawing-room, very weak, very helpless, but a convalescent.

The ball had been extracted, but fears were entertained that he would be lame for life. There was another fear which Dr. Faile had confided to Miss Clayre. After the loss of so much blood, and the impossibility till the ball had been extracted of giving strength by nourishment, there was imminent danger of decline.

He had recommended a warmer climate, but he could not be moved for the present. There was an end of the visit to Clayre Court.

As he recovered, Ivy was disappointed to find that her brother's spirits seemed to become more and more gloomy.

He had told them of his wound.

He said that as soon as the news of the mas-

sacre had reached head-quarters, several regiments had been ordered up to the post in peril. Among the rest his own. He had gone, he said, eagerly hoping at last to see real service.

The day after they arrived, a mutiny broke out in the fort. He and several others had rushed out to defend, sword in hand, the entrance of the house in which some of the women and children were, till a message could be sent for relief and aid, to another regiment which was marching close in their rear. They had succeeded, and had imprudently followed the assailants through the enclosure of the house to the entrance of the plain. A sudden shot had knocked him over just as the help arrived. It was a cavalry battalion, and had charged, driving the rebels before them back through the enclosure, right over him. He remembered nothing but the monotonous movement of a boat, which was taking him and some others, down the river. Then there was a long period of darkness, when he was in the hospital, and finally he was pronounced incurable, and sent home.

The voyage was another lapse of pain, pain, pain. He often wished they had put a stone round his neck, and thrown him overboard, like the useless, wretched dog he was.

"But *now*, Gerard, you will soon be well, and quite yourself again."

"As soon as I am well, I shall return to India."

"Gerard!"

"It is the only thing I am good for. Perhaps some stray shot may put an end to me then."

Ivy was silent, but her face told what she felt.

"Come here, darling," he said. "I will not vex you, you who have been like an angel to me all this while. But if you only knew."

Ivy kissed him, and would not let him speak. He drew her to him, and looked long in her face, stroking her hair as he did so.

"It is a good, honest, sincere face; but what is there in a face? The loveliest lie sometimes. Where is Norton?"

"He was ill, I believe, and they sent him abroad."

"He is a good fellow. Poor Norton! they have done all they could to ruin him; but his kind good heart they could not spoil. I hope he will get into no mischief in Italy, for he is as soft as water. Poor boy! Next to you, Ivy, there is no one I love so well."

He took her hand and looked in her face.

"You are very much improved, Ivy. I do not think I ever dreamed you would be so good-looking."

She laughed. "*La beauté du diable*, nothing else."

"Who taught you to wear your hair so, with that pretty blue ribbon?"

Ivy blushed. "Cordelia," she answered.

He turned pale, and was quite silent, having withdrawn his arm from her.

Ivy looked wistfully at him. "Gerard, would not you be happier if——"

"If what, Ivy? Speak out!"

There was a stern ring in his voice, which Ivy remembered as the precursor of rage in former times. She was afraid of exciting him, and remained silent.

"Why do you not speak?" he said. He paused; but seeing she was silent, sat up on his couch and took her hands, and held them with a strength which astonished her.

"Ivy, you may think what you like, but I have a right to prevent your speaking of subjects that pain me. Never, never let me hear you speak of—of my miserable and infatuated marriage."

"Gerard!"

"Yes, if you persist, I leave you at once. There are remembrances which are odious to me, and names which I will not hear."

"Names!"

"As long as we are together, Ivy, I entreat, I adjure you never to name the name of Cordelia Ashley or of Maurice Corsand. Do you hear?"

Ivy bowed. He kissed her hands.

"Now I must go back to bed, for I have overtasked myself."

He did so, and was for another fortnight considered in danger.



BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN Cordelia returned to her room after her interview with her sister, her mind was in a tumult which admitted but of one idea—escape. Mechanically she packed up her clothes, such books and music as she wished to take, her beloved engraving “*L'Art et la Liberté*,” at which, however, she did not trust herself to look, and then, breathless and exhausted, but somewhat calmer, sat down.

She had struggled, but the fate had come upon her. She must leave the Ferry; she must leave her father; she must rely upon her own resources. She did not feel resentment after her first quick revolt at her sister's words. The generous indignation which had flushed her cheek and flashed from her eyes had yielded to a profound compassion. Sarah must have been miserable to have spoken thus. If her father were so

changed, and if she, Cordelia, were the cause, directly or indirectly, it was but justice to all that she should banish herself from a home where she was a firebrand. The blow to her father's pride at a daughter of his being cast out penniless on the world was less injurious than the daily presence of such an element of discord in the atmosphere of home.

It would be best for all, that she should go. She had endured it as long as she thought her obedience was for the benefit of others; but not only Sarah's wild words, but many trifling looks, gestures, murmurs, had long brought the conviction to her mind, that her presence was a restraint and a tax upon both father and sister. Even if in the morbid state of her mind she exaggerated this, it was too natural not to be in a measure true.

She had disappointed her father's pride in her; she had unconsciously injured her sister; her whole life at home was a false one. The wrong to her sister she might atone; but till she had done so, she was best away. Her slender purse was a little diminished since she had last looked, but there was enough to take her out of England. Once abroad, she would write to M. Corsand, and ask him for a sum which would enable her to begin her preliminary studies. She had no hesitation in this. The trust and confidence of years



had made her affection for him deep and strong; and though amid the other hardships of her lot she was cut off from personal intercourse with this dear friend, she had always maintained a correspondence with him. As soon as she could she would repay her debt.

It was about three o'clock, A.M., when her preparations were concluded. She then wrote the two notes we have already seen; one to Ivy and one to her father.

She then threw herself, dressed as she was, on the bed for half an hour; at the expiration of the time she rose, and going downstairs lightly, entered the dining-room, unfastened the shutters, opened the window, and stepped out.

It was day—bright, fresh, inspiriting day. She looked neither to the right nor to the left, but went to the stables, and, after one or two ineffectual efforts, woke Snip. His first exclamation was, "If ye please; Good Lord, Miss, it is you; I thought them must be robbers!" She made him understand what she wanted; stood by while he harnessed the horse to the chaise, and then made him follow her to the house, and told him he must enter as lightly as possible, go up stairs and bring down the trunk and bag which she had left in her room, the door of which was open. Taking off his shoes, he obeyed her,

and at a quarter past four they were seated in the chaise and driving off from the stables to the train.

They reached the train in time, and Cordelia dispatched her puzzled attendant home. He did not even know to what place she had taken her ticket.

It was not till she reached Southampton and took her place in the steamer which left for Havre at noon, that the factitious calm gave way.

She sat with her veil down, and her face turned from the shore, so that no one could see her, and cried bitterly.

The plunge was taken, and the first shock was felt.

Cordelia's residence abroad had fashioned her in many ways. Everything was congenial to her there; but yet she could not leave England without a pang. She had courage, and spirit, and self-reliance; but she was sensitive to a fault. She could be pained in a thousand ways which would be unfelt by ordinary natures. To go away alone, without a "God speed you!" from a single friend, for an indefinite period, for years—it might be for ever—with a heart sore with the wounds of hurt affection and unjustifiable neglect, and aching with a sense that some previous self-will and mistaken pride had contributed to this abandonment, was a heavy trial

for a warm heart and vivid imagination like Cordelia's.

Persons of vivid imagination always feel more and less than others. Events, *per se*, are usually of neutral shades. That which appears rose tint is in reality pale pink; the sombre black is as indubitably but dim grey; but imagination, as Byron says, is either a glass broken into a thousand bits, in each of which the images are multiplied and distorted, or a glass cut into numberless facets, through which one sees nothing but at every point the bright colours of the prism. There is no medium.

To a proud woman, such as Cordelia, the mistake she had made in her marriage was the most intolerable part of her sorrow. And as, more or less, all her worst griefs dated from that period, the remembrance of Gerard was like an open, festering wound. In the whole page of her life there were but two feelings of unembittered tenderness and softness. The mournful love which clung to the memory of poor Mrs. Vibert, the yearning and hopeful affection she felt for Ivy. Even M. Corsand's true and fostering friendship was now a pain, so many thorns had been pressed into it. As she thought of Ivy, her tears flowed faster; how long should she be allowed to call that pure love hers. Would Gerard permit it? This thought was like the stab of a dagger.

"Hollo, Bill; see the lady is fainting. She be new to this ere dance, I take it."

The rough sailor who was passing had seen Cordelia throw out her arms as if for support, and caught her, or she would have dropped from her seat.

He took her down to the ladies' cabin, and laid her in a berth. When Cordelia came to herself, the stewardess was rubbing her hands, and beside her sat a young lady, whose kind, anxious face she at once recognised.

"Lucy Norris!"

"Yes, Mrs. Clayre; do you feel better: pray do not move; it is better not at this moment, while it is so rough."

"How did I come here?"

"You must have fainted; the motion is dreadful on deck, and one of the sailors carried you down."

"And you?"

"I am returning to the family with whom you placed me. They trusted me to take their two little boys to school; or, rather to Southampton, where their uncle met them, and I am now returning to my other charges."

"Where are they?"

"We have been at Tours since I left England with them two months ago; but we are going to Italy for the winter."

“To Italy?”

Cordelia half sate up at this intelligence. Italy was the aim of her wanderings.

“Yes; is it not delightful? I shall take some lessons in music there.”

“Are you happy?”

“Very. I am more of a governess than a *bonne* now. I teach the four little ones; the two elder girls had masters while we were at Tours, but were to have a governess when we left, for Mrs. Watson did not think that, except for accomplishments, we should get such good masters in Italy.”

“A French governess?”

“No; I was to have met a lady at Southampton, and we should have returned together; but Mrs. Watson’s brother, who takes charge of the little boys, told me she had been taken ill suddenly, and had given it up. It will be a great disappointment, for we were to leave Tours next week.”

“What does Mrs. Watson require of her governess?”

“To speak French, and teach it correctly, to know music, and to have the most complete knowledge of English and German.”

Cordelia reflected a little while, and then she turned to Lucy.

“Lucy, do you think, considering her disap-

pointment, and that it may be an inconvenience to her to stay longer at Tours, that Mrs. Watson might be induced to take me as her governess; at all events, till she had made arrangements with another?"

"You?"

"Yes; it is an object with me to get abroad; but the expense is greater than I can manage."

"How delighted I should be."

"It would not be possible for me to go on with you, for I have no money; but I might wait for your reply, and I would join you."

"No, Mrs. Clayre; if you will permit me, I can pay for both till we get to Tours, and then I might speak to Mrs. Watson, and time would be saved."

"But supposing she should not consent, I should be in your debt, Lucy, without any means of repaying you for a long while."

Lucy looked as if she thought it was not in the possibilities of fate that anyone, to whom such a proposition was made as to take Mrs. Clayre for a governess, could be so lost to all good sense as to refuse it, but she was a shy girl, and merely said:

"Dear Mrs. Clayre, when all I have is owing to you, it is I that am in debt to you, if you will let me serve you."

They reached Havre, and Lucy, as an experienced traveller, guided Cordelia through all the

difficulties of landing. When Cordelia had travelled with Mrs. Vibert, couriers and servants had done all for her. Cordelia had heroism enough in her nature for any sacrifices, but on such an occasion a practical little woman like Lucy was of unspeakable use.

When they were in the hotel, Lucy asked many questions about the Ferry, spoke a good deal about her sisters, and the evening passed less wretchedly than might have been anticipated by Cordelia.

She was calm, and answered quietly most of Lucy's questions. Lucy's surprise was unbounded, but she was awed by Cordelia's manner, and was not inquisitive.

The next morning they set off for Tours. Cordelia decided on accepting Lucy's kindness, and should her plan fail, there was still time to write to M. Corsand, and to devise some plan for paying back the money. But it would be an unspeakable help to her to get to Italy. When there, she could form her plans more certainly, and be able to calculate with nicety what money she required.

"There is one thing, Lucy, I must ask you as a favour; I have reasons for not wishing my real name to be known: will you introduce me as Ashton—Miss Ashton?" She blushed deeply as she spoke.

"Can I?" said Lucy. She said no more, but Cordelia understood her in a minute.

"You are right, Lucy; no, no, that must not be."

"But what can be done? Oh, dearest Mrs. Clayre, this is worse than ever, to have brought you here, and then to leave you."

"No," said Cordelia, faintly, for she was heart-struck at this disappointment, "there is no help for it. I am the person to blame. I should have thought of this. I intend to take a feigned name, but I have no right to make you a party to the deception."

Both friends were silent for a time.

At last Cordelia looked up.

"What kind of a person is Mrs. Watson?"

"She is a very—how shall I describe her?—talkative lady. She speaks well, too. She thinks of nothing but her daughters. She is kind, but strict."

"I will go to see her, and offer myself as her governess. Yes, that will be the way. Do not say a word about me, Lucy."

The next day they arrived at Tours.

The morning after, Cordelia called on Mrs. Watson. Though her dress was of the simplest kind, and it was impossible to be quieter or more retiring in manner, there was an air about her visitor which surprised Mrs. Watson.

She did not give her name, but soon explained the object of her visit. She was acquainted with Miss Norris, had met her on board the steamer, and had heard of the defalcation of the expected governess. It was her purpose to try and get an engagement, and she had called to offer herself.

"Your name?"

"My name," said Cordelia, with a mournful smile, "I do not wish to make known. I call myself now Ashton."

"But do you think it is possible for me to engage as governess to my daughters a lady who is a perfect stranger to me, and who acknowledges she bears a feigned name? You will doubtless say that you have no opinion as to how I should act, and I reply that it argues a want of good sense not to see at once that such a proposition cannot be entertained for a moment by anyone who has the least knowledge of the world, or the smallest regard for the welfare of her children; for I put it to you, whether it would be consistent with prudence to run the risk of admitting into one's family in such a confidential, intimate position, a stranger, and not only a stranger, but a person who has some reason for adopting an alias; your own intelligence ought to tell you that such rashness would be unjustifiable in a mother, and that the expectation of my consent to such a plan is at once an argument that your own notions of

propriety are very different from what I should expect in a person offering herself to undertake so responsible a position, and that very expectation would of itself make my consent impossible—”

Mrs. Watson was at last out of breath and paused, as she always did, abruptly, but Cordelia took advantage of it, and rising, said :

“I thought it possible, though not perhaps probable ; but I will no longer take up your valuable time.”

“Sit down,” said Mrs. Watson, and she smiled grimly, “I have not finished yet—you will tell me that this is a case of mutual convenience ; I am anxious to leave Tours, but seek to meet a governess first, you are anxious to reach Italy, but you must find a situation which will give the means of doing so—and there is a certain truth in what you say (Cordelia had not uttered a syllable) ; but then I on my part consider whether such a convenience might not be dearly purchased, if I saw any reason afterwards to repent it—to be sure there is perhaps a way of arranging affairs in such a manner that I can obviate much that would be unusual and imprudent, but I must ask you a few questions—you seem very young.”

“I am four-and-twenty.”

“I believe you, but you look younger, though perhaps, as you say, that may be from your com-

plexion. I observe that the youthfulness of English complexions strikes people who have been a little time abroad, and gives a great air of youth; a French woman or an Italian looks much older than we do at four-and-twenty, or at any age; but it also depends a little on the actual status of the woman; a married woman generally looks older than a single one—you are single I conclude?" but, though Mrs. Watson came to that conclusion, she did not answer this question herself, she waited for Cordelia to reply.

"No, I am married;" the answer was spoken in a firm, hard voice.

Mrs. Watson looked at her. In spite of her rambling, disjointed talk, Mrs. Watson had a good deal of quickness of perception. Cordelia's good looks, dimmed as they were at this moment by anxiety, fatigue, and sorrow, would have been an insurmountable obstacle, had they not been accompanied by a certain coldness and decision of manner, which was the utter reverse of levity or vanity. She had what the French call *un air digne*, and this impressed all who came near her: Lucy looked thoroughly respectable, and had also *un air digne*, but without the high-bred look which was so peculiar in Cordelia. Moreover, besides the high-bred look, there was a reserve which claimed consideration. Under ordinary circumstances Mrs. Watson would not have even ad-

mitted Cordelia to the honours of an interview, but as it was, she was so inconvenienced by the failure of her arrangements, that she allowed herself time to examine her, to see if there was anything in the applicant that could compensate for the singularity of the application. There was also one peculiarity in Mrs. Watson which was in Cordelia's favour. Mrs. Watson was so loquacious that she not only poured out all her own thoughts and surmises in words, but always uttered the opposite line of argument which might be excited in her hearer's mind—she *monologued* a dialogue—and the end was, though she very glibly answered in theory all her opponent's objections (spoken by herself), she became in fact converted to them, and usually acted in a precise ratio, inversely to her own triumphant reasonings, pronounced in the first person. Besides this, she was naturally perverse, and liked to act differently from what people expected. Her whole life was an antithesis. In spite, therefore, of what she said she hesitated, and at last, the urgency of her position influencing her, she determined to yield. She resolved to take Cordelia under certain conditions.

“Will you allow me to make a proposition to you? We are going for two or three months to the baths of St. Gervais. During that time I will accept your services, and you will accompany us

there, after which time we shall part and I will pay your expenses to any town in Italy you choose. Our connection will there end, and though you will naturally suggest that this arrangement is not what is perhaps quite agreeable to you, as in three months you will find yourself quite as isolated on the whole as you do now, still there is no other way of coming to an agreement, consistently with what I apprehend my position as the mother of young daughters, requires. But first I must ask one question, on which indeed depends my final acquiescence. Are you legally separated from your husband—is it an amicable separation or are you—?”

Mrs. Watson was going to say divorced, but Cordelia interrupted her.

“ My husband is in India. Miss Norris knows my home.”

“ I consent, then ;” and before Mrs. Watson could commence her interminable remarks, in two voices, Cordelia added :

“ I rely, however, on your honour, that you will not question Miss Norris as to my name. My position, the character my parents bear in the county in which they live, you are at liberty to ask about, but nothing more. She knows that I left my father’s house the day before I met her.”

“ I consent,” repeated Mrs. Watson ; “ and you

will be safe from all inquisitorial proceedings from me. As you will allow, I cannot do less than make some inquiries, and I will concede on my side, that on the whole, the obstacles may be less than I feared."

"Then you will not ask my name?"

"Certainly not; and I shall even request Miss Norris not to forget that you desire to be called Miss Ashton."

"Thank you; when shall I come?" Cordelia resolutely stopped all further remarks by going to the door.

"I will make arrangements to leave Tours the day after to-morrow. Are you ready to join us on the morning we leave? It will not be necessary, then, to take the people or servants here in our confidence. I take no servants, Miss Norris, and I take care of the four little children, and the elder girls wait on themselves. You will, perhaps, doubt being able to leave immediately. . . ."

"I will be here at the time you name."

Cordelia here opened the door, when Mrs. Watson rang the bell. "Tell Miss Norris I wish to speak to her," she said to the servant. "Wait a minute, I beg," she said to Cordelia.

Lucy entered, looking anxiously from one to the other.

"Miss Ashton," said Mrs. Watson, with em-

phasis on the name, "has undertaken the situation of governess to the girls, Miss Norris, and will join us on Monday. Miss Ashton accompanies us to the Baths of St. Gervais."

Lucy was considerably awed, but very much delighted. At whatever price this concession had been gained, she rejoiced at it.

She followed Cordelia to the door.

"Did you tell her all?"

"All that was necessary. She knows that Ashton is not my real name, and that I am married."

"How extraordinary!" said Lucy

Cordelia almost smiled. She thought that Mrs. Watson had become so manageable, purely as a matter of her own convenience. She was not disposed to cavil at it, as it was a matter of such consequence to her.

"But she is a most extraordinary person."

"Do you think so?"

"Don't *you* think so, Lucy?"

Lucy blushed. She had not such a keen sense of humour as Cordelia, and though she had been often perplexed and mystified by the torrent of apparent contradictions in Mrs. Watson's harangues, she rather attributed the fault to her own want of quickness than to anything else.

"I fancied it was my stupidity which made it

so difficult for me to understand her; but she is kind, and really fond of her daughters."

"I dare say she is, but it must be very confusing to listen to her for long. At all events, I am glad to think I shall be with you for three months, Lucy."

"And I, dear Mrs. Clayre, what do you think I must feel to know that I shall see you every day?"

They parted, and Cordelia, as she sate in her room at the inn, felt inexpressibly grateful that the first step had been so successfully carried through.

"Italy," she murmured to herself—to her it was not only the land of promise, but the land of memory. It was a sepulchre and a shrine. The Crusaders, when they saw afar the Holy City lying amid its cincture of desert, did not utter the word Jerusalem with a more profound emotion.

CHAPTER II.

ALL baths are alike. There is the same busy idleness, the same melancholy pleasure, the same dull gaiety. Very young or very old people can like these collections of strangers, whom a link of potash, or sulphur, or iron, have brought together. Everybody tries to be amused by somebody else, and the result is that every one is more or less bored.

Cordelia fulfilled the duties of her new position admirably. She spent the morning teaching her pupils, and the afternoon walking with them. In the evenings she usually sat in her own bedroom. Mrs. Watson thought she had obtained a treasure. Lucy was delighted. At first Cordelia had been afraid of meeting with some persons who had known her while she was travelling with Mrs. Vibert, but she recognised no one, and she hoped that through her thick veil, which she always wore down, no one would recognise her.

No one did, as far as the fact of imagining they had ever seen her before, but many persons noticed Mrs. Watson's beautiful governess. Mrs.

Watson was considered eccentric, and this was a proof of it.

"Think of a woman having a governess for her two daughters, who absolutely extinguishes them. By Jove, I met them all four the other day, botanising in the mountains, and they all looked like housemaids beside her."

"She is distinguished looking, but I detest that kind of woman. I am sure she has a devil of a temper."

"How do you make that out, Fitz? Has she snubbed you?"

"No, but there is something so constrained in her voice, and so much self-will in her face."

"You had better not abuse her, for here comes Norton, Mrs. Watson's nephew."

"Has *he* caught it, poor lad?—he is as mad as his aunt, but in a different way. He does not talk one to death, but moons about as if he were dumb."

"The shyest fellow ——"

"I cannot think what they intend doing with him."

"I understand precisely what they *have* been doing with him."

"Hey! who?"

"Sir Arthur and Lady Clayre."

"He is Sir Arthur's heir."

"*Pro tem.*, but I fear the boy will never reach

his heirship ; that Lady Clayre is the most infernal woman."

" How ? "

" She has ruined that boy ; what with one thing and the other, she has systematically gone to work to make him the poor creature he is. A course of private schools, judiciously applied, will do the work of the cruel uncles of old very quickly."

" It's true she hates him ; she wants the Court for her boy."

" Absurd ! why, there is that other fellow, who was at Eton, who is much older than Norton, and who is married."

" Stop, that fellow is in India, separated from his wife, and without children ; he has almost less chance than Norton ; who'll bet with me that Lady Clayre's boy gets the Court within five years ? "

" We are not up in family histories like you ; but look, there goes the governess and her two charges ; she always looks like a greyhound leading two little pugs."

" And, by Jove, there goes Norton off to join her." So ended this animated conversation.

A few weeks after they had arrived at St. Gervais, Norton Clayre had made his appearance. He was a nephew of Mrs. Watson's sister-in-law (her late husband's sister), and was also in the habit of calling Mrs. Watson aunt.

His prospective baronetcy and his heirship to a large estate always made Norton Clayre welcome to his Aunt Watson. Now that the doctors had pronounced his a doomed life, and gave no hopes of his living more than a couple of years or so, his grandfather gave him more liberty. He might now have done whatever he pleased, short of marriage.

He had come to drink the waters at St. Gervais. The only persons he knew there were Mrs. Watson and her family, and he had become their shadow. This was partly owing to his shyness. He required some one he knew to walk with him, and to interpose a friendly screen as it were between himself and the strangers about him; and it was also due to the extraordinary influence that Cordelia's beauty had on him.

It was as infatuated and as invincible an attraction as the moth's to the flame of the candle.

He rarely spoke, but he listened, he watched, he gazed. Though nearly one-and-twenty, he was so youthful-looking and so boyish in his manners, that Cordelia looked on him as if he were a mere child. She was very kind to him, for his sweetness and gentleness of temper endeared him to her.

It was a fatal kindness.

Cordelia liked to look at him. There was sufficient resemblance to the Clayre family in his

face for it to interest her. And he was the only person in St. Gervais to whom she spoke when they occasionally met, and who she would ever permit to accompany her in her walks.

He had soon told her about himself, about Sir Arthur, described the Court, his wearisome life there, the perpetual thwarting and contradicting he had received from his birth, without positive bad treatment, and the family history was becoming known and better understood by Cordelia than it had ever been before.

The only person who had ever shown him kindness was his cousin, Gerard Clayre.

Ah !

"Do you know him, Miss Ashton?"

"A little—at least, I once knew him well."

The words dropped out as if each burned her.

"He is very handsome and a very fine fellow. He tried to let Sir Arthur send me sometimes to him, and whenever he could he would come to see me. And I cannot tell you how kind he was. He is my best friend."

"Do you write to him?"

"No. He quarrelled with Sir Arthur and Lady Clayre. They both hate him, I believe, especially Lady Clayre; and Sir Arthur told him he did not choose any communication to be kept up with the family."

"Did you ever see his wife?"

"Oh no, never. I heard she was a bad, low woman. How did you know he was married? He was taken in, I believe."

Cordelia's cheeks were like flame. "Who told you?"

"Sir Arthur did. He said, Gerard had been a fool and had found it out. One thing I am resolved to do when I am of age. I shall be of age in a few months. When I am, then Sir Arthur must make me a better allowance. I shall then write to Gerard and share it with him."

"You are very good, Mr. Clayre," and she smiled a smile which seemed to the young votary as if Paradise had opened in her face.

"Did you ever see Ivy Clayre?" she asked.

"Yes. What a pleasant-looking girl she is. I thought her so handsome, too, at one time."

"When did you see her last?"

"Not long before I left England."

"She was looking well?"

"So well!"

"When do you return to England, Mr. Clayre?"

"I really do not know, Miss Ashton. When does Mrs. Watson leave St. Gervais?"

"Very shortly, and I am then going to leave her."

"Leave her! And where do you go?"

"I really cannot tell just yet."

"But she remains in Italy."

"Yes. I believe she will pass the winter at Rome."

"And you have not made up your mind——"

"I have made up my mind not to go there."

Norton paused at this reply, and, as the walk was terminated, left her.

His mind was scarcely able to hold the idea that in a few days this dream of felicity would be over.

He felt that he could not live without her, and yet how could he fancy that so beautiful a creature would deign to look on him. He underrated himself with all the genuine humility of a true lover. What should he do?

After much thinking, more than he had ever devoted to any subject in his life, he came to the conclusion that he would follow Mrs. Watson in her travelling programme. He would be sure to know when and where Miss Ashton settled herself again; and as soon as that was ascertained he could fly to the spot. Miss Ashton was the dearest, best, most beautiful of human creatures. Had Gerard not been married she would have been the wife for him; but as it was, she might, perhaps, allow herself to be adored by him.

To the poor in spirit is promised the sight of God; and if the presence, or rather possession,

of a rapturous love is a glimpse of the infinite, it was the case with Norton.

He had been hitherto so singularly neglected and denied the most ordinary affection ; without positive ill-treatment, he had been so carelessly overlooked, that the ordinary courtesies of social intercourse were received by him as favours ; and when these courtesies came from a being like Cordelia, heaven was opened to the lad.

The night before they left St. Gervais (they were all to leave together) Cordelia sat down stairs talking over some final arrangements. As far as Genoa their routes were the same. Norton was in the room, and sat on a low chair behind her. During a pause in the conversation she heard him say—

“Miss Ashton, I have written to my cousin Gerard.”

“Have you ?” She could not help starting.

“I have told him about this place, and about you.”

“Me ?”

“Yes. I told him I met you here. I have told him how good you have been to me, Miss Ashton.”

“Good ! Oh no !”

“I have asked his advice. I know he will give me the best advice.”

"Are you in any difficulty? Can I help you? I am nearer at hand."

"No. You cannot help me now at least. Some day. Do you think, Miss Ashton, that a woman can ever love a man every way inferior to her, but who loves her with all his heart and soul, and who would be contented——" There was such a look in the young man's face of ardent, devoted love that Cordelia perceived at once his meaning.

"Hush, Mr. Clayre, you must not speak of such things to me."

"Why?"

"Forgive me. I should have told you before, but I never dreamed of this."

"Speak!"

"You must not speak of love to me: I am a married woman."

"Good God!" The unfortunate young man made this exclamation, and then left the room.

Cordelia was shocked at the tone of utter agony in which he spoke. She reproached herself bitterly, and yet who would have thought it? She had always treated him as a boy, as the relative of her pupils, but with less reserve than she showed towards them, because he was Ivy's cousin also. She could not accuse herself of look or word which might be misconstrued by the worst intentioned person.

Like all really proud and impassioned women, she abhorred coquetry. But while she thus was exploring one side of the question she forgot another. The mischief was not caused by her manner, the evil was in the deception. Announced as a married woman, Norton would never have dreamed of her but as a friend. He was too guileless and simple, although nearly twenty-one and the heir to a baronetcy, to have dreamed then of loving her. But even in self defence a deception is dangerous. It is like a stone thrown by an unskilful hand. It is sure to hit some one.

She sate apart from the others anxious and pre-occupied, and hoping that Norton would come down again ; but the minutes passed, and she did not see him.

Presently the tea was brought in, and she resolved upon announcing it to him herself. She went up stairs, and, passing along the gallery, went to the furthest end and knocked at what she supposed was the door of his room. She knocked once, but there was no reply ; again, and she heard a very unmistakeable oath, but in French, and some one threw open the door. It was a Frenchman, in shirt and trousers, who appeared to be laboriously washing his teeth, for his tooth brush was in his hand. His first angry *qui me demande ?* softened into *ma chère dame—est ce moi que vous demandez ?* Cordelia had turned away

with a hasty *pardon* before he had finished, and was trying to remember which was the door, when Mrs. Watson overtook her.

“What are you doing here, Miss Ashton? Really, if it had been one of the girls, I might have been tempted to scold: but you will say with you it is very different. Yet an hotel is not exactly the place for a young woman to wander about; for me, my years protect me. Still, it would be better to give your orders to the waiters next time, and not venture——”

She was going on, when turning back they both saw the Frenchman still standing, tooth-brush in hand, at the door of his room, confounded at the sudden apparition of two such different specimens of their sex.

Mrs. Watson's eloquence came to a full stop, and Cordelia had time to say—

“I was going to tell——” and she paused in her turn. “I am afraid,” she said, “that Mr. Clayre is not well.”

Mrs. Watson looked keenly at her. Perhaps, if she could have relieved her suspicions by a pendulum dialogue, they would not have remained rooted in her mind; but the tiresome Frenchman still stood watching them.

“You had better go down and I will go and see. You know Norton changed his room yesterday.”

With her anxiety undiminished, Cordelia went down and waited for Mrs. Watson. The time passed slowly, and it was an hour before she appeared. When she did so, she was alone, and looked both alarmed and vexed.

"What's the matter, Mamma?" asked her daughters. Cordelia dared not ask, though she guessed.

"So tiresome! That boy, Norton, has been over-walking himself, or exposing himself too much to the sun, *que sais je*; but the upshot is, he has brought on that bleeding at the lungs which causes us all so much anxiety; the physician says"

"Did you send for him, Mamma?"

Her daughter always interrupted her with very little ceremony.

"Of course I did. He was in the house, and came up stairs. He said it might be nothing; a little rest would set him up in a day or two; but the worst of it is, as I told him, everything was ready for our departure; rooms given up, carriages and horses ordered: he told me that two or three days, at most, would be required, but he thought a rest absolutely necessary. I do not know what to do."

"What fun!" ejaculated her youngest daughter, who was a living proof of the truth of La Rochefoucauld's observation, "that there is

always something pleasant to us in the misfortunes of our friends."

"The worst of it is, he is *so* down-hearted, poor fellow! When I knocked at his door he did not take the trouble to answer, and when I went in I found him thrown on the bed, with his face downwards. I thought at first he was asleep, but when I went up to him, I saw he was ill. He begged to be left alone, for he did not care to live. Of course I paid no attention to that, and Doctor Hubert being, fortunately, in the house, he has given him a calmant, and he is probably asleep now. The question is, What we are to do? And the only plan I can devise, Miss Ashton, is that, if you do not mind it, I shall ask you to take my place in the carriage to-morrow, while I remain here. If you will wait for me at Turin, I hope to release you within the week, and unless you tell me you have engagements which prevent this, we will consider it settled."

Cordelia bowed assent. She wouldn't trust herself to speak. The party dispersed for the night, and she went to her room.

There was something so defenceless and helpless about Norton, that her heart smote her to have caused him such grief. To leave St. Gervais without knowing whether he were better or worse (the carriages were ordered at so early

an hour that she knew neither Mrs. Watson nor any one else, but the waiter, would be astir), was an additional pang. To give pain to all who came within her sphere seemed Cordelia's destiny.

She could not sleep, and feverish and excited as she was, resolved on writing to Norton.

His relationship to Gerard and to Ivy made it seem so natural to her to try and soothe him, she thought of nothing else. Had she been calmer she might have foreseen what an imprudence it was; but rashness and impetuosity were Cordelia's besetting sins.

"Dear Mr. Norton,

"I am so sorry you are ill, and more sorry that I must leave St. Gervais without seeing you once more. You must forgive me if I have given you pain. One day, perhaps, I shall be able to tell you what a claim I have on your friendship, and you on mine.

"Your friend,

"CORDELIA."

This note, as soon as she was dressed, she sealed, and gave to the waiter to give Mr. Clayre. The man was a respectable man, and took it without supposing there was anything suspicious in so simple an occurrence. The young man was ill, and his cousins and

their governess sent him their adieux before their departure. When Mrs. Watson went in to see her nephew in the morning, and to ask Dr. Hubert what he thought of him, she found him better. The note had been given, and had done more for the poor fellow than the "calmant." It was in his hand when his aunt entered. She saw it, and thought she recognised the hand; but to be certain, she asked, after she had left her nephew, who had brought him the letter.

"I did, madame."

"There was no message for me?"

"No, madame. Madlle. Astone only told me to give that note to Mr. Clayre. He is better, I trust, madame?" added the civil waiter.

"Thank you; yes."

Mrs. Watson passed into her room and reflected. How glad she was that Miss Ashton had gone, and would probably never cross her path again. There was, however, a leaven of suspicion left in her mind, and not being able to work it out in assertions and contradictions in speech, it became aggravated. She had, like most mothers, an antagonism to pretty governesses. It was an evil which, for the sake of the education of ugly daughters, had to be endured; but it was an evil. She considered herself also in the light of guardian to Norton. An inclination for

one of her daughters might have been gently encouraged, but this was preposterous. The woman, too, was older than he, and this was but another proof how deficient he was.

He partially recovered, however, and they pursued their journey.

Within the week Mrs. Watson wrote to say, she would no longer detain Miss Ashton, as she would herself arrive almost as soon as her letter. If Miss Ashton could leave so as to allow Mrs. Watson to occupy her bed-room, they need only order an additional one for Norton.

When Mrs. Watson arrived, she found all as she desired. After a tearful, affectionate parting with Lucy, Cordelia had left Turin.

CHAPTER III.

—♦—

WHEN Cordelia left Turin she chose Milan for her future abode. When there, she wrote to M. Corsand. She told him how she had managed to get so far, and that once in Italy she felt sure that her long desired aim could be realised. But she needed help as to the preliminary studies, and she frankly asked him for the loan of the necessary money. She calculated this for six months at fifty pounds. She gave her address. By return of post came the answer, with a bill for one hundred pounds. M. Corsand advised her to wait for a twelvemonth before she made her appearance, and sent her a letter of introduction to the manager at Milan. He told her that in six months he would send another bank bill to the same amount; that he felt it was a safe investment of two hundred pounds, as long before the twelvemonth had expired she would meet with an engagement which would put her on the road to fortune at once. He advised her, after she had studied for several months at Milan, to go for the summer to some quiet country place and rest her-

self, so that she might be strong and fresh to commence the arduous career she had chosen. Every word was full of good advice and of the kindest affection. He regretted she had not applied to him before, so as to have spared that episode of the Watsons. He could understand the independence of spirit which led to it—but was he not her guardian, her friend in the widest, deepest sense of the word? Did she not know that his life, his purse, belonged not to himself, but in the first place to one or two beloved ones, and then to all who needed it? The personality of life was over for him. Did not Cordelia know this?

One must have felt entirely alone to appreciate what a boon written words from the one being who still has an affection for us, can be. That bleak sense of utter isolation which had hardened poor Cordelia till she had almost felt heartless, thawed into tears over this letter. That tie with one of the noblest of human hearts of which that letter was the pledge, gave strength to her sinking spirit.

After an effort so rash and desperate as hers, there is always a re-action. As long as she was at the Watsons she had not time to think; she was surrounded from morning to night, and upheld by the hope of getting on in her journey. A shipwrecked mariner while he is struggling in

the ocean has no thought but to get to shore, but when the wave has flung him there, naked, forlorn, alone, the bitterness is felt. He lives, and with life comes all its trials. Cordelia was resolute to do, what she had willed to do, for so long. She had all that confidence in ultimate victory which is one of the tests of a true vocation, but the path was singularly thorny at first.

As soon as she had dispatched her first letter to M. Corsand, she had inquired and found out the address of the manager of one of the theatres. After much difficulty, and many delays, he appointed an hour to see her.

She called. He was at breakfast, and Cordelia was kept waiting.

At length she was ushered in. He was an over-dressed, vulgar man, with an unpleasant expression of countenance. He began in French, asking her business, staring at her with evident surprise, and some annoyance. She told him her wishes. He shrugged his shoulders in the most contemptuous manner.

"We have dozens of such applications every day."

"But I have been taught by ——," she mentioned a celebrated name in Naples, "and he said I could sing on any stage. Will you allow me to sing to you?"

"I have no time this morning; besides, there

are more than enough engaged. You are too handsome, *ma chère*, not to find—" he stopped, for Cordelia rose abruptly, and went to the door.

Again he shrugged his shoulders, as she went out, and muttered to himself, " They all kick and plunge at first, but they all come to it at last. How sick I am of it all, what a *chien de métier* this is— here is her address at all events, Signora Corda. A Signora, too, and the fool of a husband lets her trot about alone—"

He put aside the card, for another person came in, and the thought passed from his mind entirely.

Cordelia went home a little fluttered. The first taste of disappointment is always acrid, especially if accompanied with a sense of injustice. Had she been heard, and then rejected, it would, she fancied, have been more endurable; and then her cheeks flushed at the insolence of the man. Some women would, however, have been much more indignant. In the serious aim Cordelia proposed to herself, she winced for a minute under the insect sting, but only for a moment. She knew well with what cowardly insults a certain class of bad men treat women, who have a double claim on their manliness, because they are poor and defenceless. But she also felt that with a little determination and calmness, most women are sufficient to themselves.

If you run, a dog attacks you; if you stand still and confront him, he will lick your feet. But as she sat alone in her little room that evening, she felt that the trifle in her purse could only last a day or two longer. If M. Corsand's answer was delayed, she would be for many days penniless. The only resource was selling some of her few trinkets. She had a gold bracelet with a carbuncle heart attached to it. It was Gerard's first gift to her. After their marriage he had had the date of his first seeing her, and the date of the marriage engraved upon it. She had kept it hitherto as something of a talisman; she had now rather a fierce pleasure in getting rid of it; she thought she cut herself off from her past life by so doing; she took it herself to a jeweller's, and received a small sum for it. It had cost about four times as much, but she thought herself lucky in receiving five Napoleons for it.

She did not regret the bracelet even when, on the very day she expected it, she received M. Corsand's enclosures.

She forwarded his letter to the other manager.

The very next day she received a most polite letter from him, and an offer of waiting on her at any time she would appoint.

She fixed the same day.

He came, and his manner was most respectful. He said that for the time being there was no

opening, the theatre was about closing ; but for the next season they might arrange something. Would she sing to him, or would she wait till he brought Signor Masconi, the leader of the orchestra, and the best judge of a voice in Italy ?

Cordelia preferred singing to him at once.

He listened attentively.

"Brava, brava ! A fine voice, a good method ; but a want of confidence, of *savoir faire*, to make the best of so much flexibility. Who did you intend studying with ?"

"Can you recommend me a good master ?"

"Certainly, the first in Italy, Signor Omalfi. Here is his address."

"And can you speak positively as to any future engagement ?"

"Would you allow me to leave it an open question till you have had six weeks' lessons of Signor Omalfi. Your voice is very fine ; in a room I can conceive of nothing finer, but the stage is so different. Six weeks from this time I will call again."

Cordelia was too inexperienced to know that the manager had resolved, the moment he heard her, to engage her ; but a kind of second sight had told him that she would probably consent more easily to his terms if the affair was a little doubtful. At the same time he was very much alarmed lest any rival manager or scout from any other

theatre should become aware of this treasure, and that she might slip through his fingers.

"As you have addressed yourself to me first, I can rely upon you, I suppose, not to mention the purpose of your studies, except in a general way, to Signor Omalfi. In all these affairs we must act with the greatest—greatest caution, and—and delicacy."

Cordelia consented, and content that he had put his hand on a gold mine in having been introduced to such a voice, the manager bowed himself out.

The next day Cordelia sent for her new singing master, and made arrangements for a series of lessons.

She could not help smiling when, after she had sung through a scale, he turned round and said—

"Fine material, good disposition—but no art. What is a voice, if you do not know how to sing? What is a jewel if not polished? You will see; attend to me, and in six months you will know how to sing."

Evidently Signor Omalfi intended to take all the merit of having formed her voice. He too felt that he had an artist beside him, but the conceit of the professor was too strong to allow him to acknowledge so much a talent in one he had never taught.

perhaps, and too little colour; but these are defects easily remedied in these days."

"Who is she?"

"She is married to some scamp, I suspect, for I have never seen the husband, and she lives alone."

"Her name?"

"La Signora Corda; she must have married an Italian."

"The same who was recommended to me by a friend in Paris. But it is no use now; the season is over."

"I tell you, if you allow her to slip through your fingers you will be doing yourself harm. Engage her, I tell you."

At the end of the six months the manager called—Cordelia sang to him. He was pleased to find that she was improved in the firmness and strength of her voice. The daily practising, the careful study had had its effect. He left her without settling the point; but the next day she received a note, and a written agreement, which, if she consented to, bound her to sing at the Pergola theatre, in Florence, during the following carnival, in the operas of *Semiramide* and *Lucrezia Borgia*.

It was now summer. Nearly a year had passed since Ivy had arrived at the Ferry, and nine months since Cordelia had left England.

During that period the quiet, composed Ivy had led a life full of vicissitudes, while the more excitable Cordelia, after the one great wrench from England and home life, had spent a monotonous existence—first with the Watsons, in teaching, and afterwards at Milan, in study. She had grieved about Norton, but she thought that absence would soon cause all recollection of her to fade from his mind. Cordelia had little belief in the power of her own attractions. She had, however, learnt one lesson from that episode, and resolved to conceal no longer the fact of her being a married woman. She had called herself, therefore, the Signora Corda.

After another month devoted to her lessons, both in Italian and singing, Cordelia thought she should follow M. Corsand's advice, and go to some quiet country place to spend most of the time which must elapse before her engagement commenced. She required repose. Milan is such a crowded town, and so much on the high road for travellers, that she was continually afraid of meeting persons she knew. She rarely allowed herself a long walk. She pined for exercise and air. Though she had so determinately cut herself off from all recollection of the past, her heart would sometimes ache. In such a position one has a self-compassion for one's-self, which is almost worse than anything else to bear.

But with all its loneliness and apparent dullness, these months were happier than any time she had known since the days of Mrs. Vibert. She was no longer helpless, and she was cultivating with care the abilities God had given her. Every one bound to her had cast her off, directly or indirectly; and if there was isolation, at least there was freedom.

In June she settled herself for four months at Siena. Her life at Siena is best described by giving here one of her letters to M. Corsand.

END OF VOL. I.

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